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BA ENGLISH

SHAKESPEARE

HAKESPEARE
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SHAKESPEARE

LIFE AND WORKS OF SHAKESPEARE

STRUCTURE

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INTRODUCTION

William Shakespeare (1564–1616) is known as the master of English Literature. He was an English playwright, poet, actor, inventor of words, and master of drama and certainly one of the most famous artists of all time. He wrote approximately 36 plays and 154 sonnets. Some of his famous plays include:

- *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
- *The Merchant of Venice*
- *Julius Caesar*
- *As You Like It*
- *Hamlet*
- *Twelfth Night*
- *Othello*

Shakespeare changed the English language, inventing dozens of new words which we still use today. His plays have been translated into more than 90 languages and his plays have been performed in several countries of the world. In this book, Shakespeare, students will get to study in detail about Shakespeare's dramatic career, the time period in which he wrote, as well as some of his most famous plays and characters.

This book has been designed keeping in mind the self-instruction mode (SIM) format and follows a simple pattern, wherein each unit of the book begins with the Introduction followed by the Objectives for the topic. The content is then presented in a simple and easy-to-understand manner, and is interspersed with Check Your Progress questions to reinforce the student's understanding of the topic. A list of Self-Assessment Questions and Exercises is also provided at the end of each unit. The Summary and Key Words further act as useful tools for students and are meant for effective recapitulation of the text.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

William Shakespeare is one of the greatest playwrights of the English language. It is difficult to chronicle the initial period of his life and experience. There is not much information available. Scholars rely on existing records and documents to outline and sketch the life of William Shakespeare. It is now generally accepted that William Shakespeare was baptized on 26 April 1564. The ceremony took place at HolyTrinitychurch (Stanford).

William Shakespeare was born to John Shakespeare and Mary Arden. Mary Arden was the daughter of Robert Arden, who was a farmer by profession. Mary Ardenhadinheriteda goodamountofproperty intheformofland inWilmot (near Stanford) from her father. The Shakespeare family was blessed with four daughters and four sons. William Shakespeare was the eldest of the four boys. It is believed that out of the four girls onlyone survived.

Documents suggests that in 1556, John Shakespeare bought the house which is situated in Henley Street, that which we identify today as the birthplace of Shakespeare. The primary job of John Shakespeare was of producing gloves, but we know that he also worked as a merchant of wool and corn. By the year 1570, it is believed that John Shakespeare had started lending money to other people as well. John Shakespeare was considered to be an effluent businessman who was successful in a number of businesses that he undertook. He was a man who owned his own property in Stanford. Being a man of repute and influence he played a significant role in shaping the municipal life of the town he was part of. John Shakespeare attained a number of significant positions in the Government of Stanford and eventually occupied the position of Mayor in the year 1569.

But soon, financial struggle started haunting the Shakespeare family. And by the year 1576, John Shakespeare was steeped into financial difficulties to such a great extent that he had mortgaged Mary Arden's property to bail the familyout of the situation.

We do not have access to any authentic document which highlights the early years of education that William Shakespeare undertook. But scholars agree that William Shakespeare must have attended the grammar school in Stanford where he undertook subjects such as the Classics, grammar as well as literature. It is usually assumed that William Shakespeare had to give up formal schoolingbythe age of 13 so that he could financiallysupport his father.

William Shakespeare almost certainly went to one of Stratford's 'petty' or junior schools where he would have learnt his letters with the help of a hornbook. From the age of seven or thereabouts, he would have progressed to the King's New School where the emphasis would have been on Latin, it still being the international language of Europe in the 1500s. Shakespeare probably left school at the age of 14 or 15. The plays written by William Shakespeare highlight his knowledge of Latin language. As we all know some of the classical writers like Ovid, Terence, and Plautus et al influenced his writings - both poetry and plays. We also come across significant display of Romanhistoryinhis writings. All this might have reached him through his school curriculum, as teachingLatin in school was most common duringthose days.

Along with Latin he was also taught arithmetic in his classes. Even though his education did not earn him the reputation of a "learned man" yet it was sufficient enough to provide him with a sound education. It is well understood that due to financial difficulties he was asked to leave the school and take up a job so that his family could be supported through some income. But as far as the nature of his employment goes no one is sure about it. When

he was 19, he married Anne Hathaway, who was 26 then. Anne Hathaway was the daughter of a very rich yeoman who hailed from Shottery. It is believed that this marriage took place in extreme urgency and was not a successful one. The couple had three children- Susannah, Judith and *Hamlet*, the last two were twins. Stories suggest that by this point William Shakespeare had got himself embroiled in bad company. Soon he was part of a deer stealing episode which made him run away from his home town. One cannot be very sure about the authenticity of this episode. There are number of stories concerning the "lost years" of William Shakespeare. Over the years there has been hardly any information concerning his life during this phase. But needless, it is believed that a few years after his marriage, around 1587 he left his native place and moved to London to explore better avenues.

This was a period when drama was gaining popularity in London due to the influence of the University Wits. Shakespeare discovered his interest in the stage. He started the stage career as an actor and then he turned his attention towards play writing. But of course, running his attention towards writing did not stop him from continue his acting. By the year 1592, Shakespeare was already an established name in the field of literature. Pamphlet written by Graham Greene, in the same year, had an oblique reference to him in an inappropriate manner suggesting his elevation to a significant status.

During Shakespeare's younger years, travelling groups of professional actors visited Stratford. It is possible that these performers were responsible for making Shakespeare interested in the stage. Some critics also suggest that Shakespeare's entry into the world of theatre in London city could have been made possible by the contact he had built for himself through these travelling groups.

In the year 1593, when the plague broke in London city most of the theatres was shutdown. During this period Shakespeare turned his attention towards writing poetry. In the very same year, Shakespeare published Venus and Adonis, which was an erotic poem. The poem was dedicated to Henry Wriothesley, Third Earl of Southampton. It is believed that Henry was young courtier and Queen Elizabeth held him in high affection. In the year 1594 William Shakespeare became the founding member as well as shareholder for Lord Chamberlain's Men. He also contributed as actor and playwright in the company. Shakespeare essayed the role of *Richard III*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Hamlet*. Few years later the company was renamed to The King's Men. They performed mostly in the court then in other venues.

It is understood that Shakespeare remained in London for close to 20 years after this. He worked hard and produced a few plays every year which helped them grow both in popularity as well as in wealth. He soon became a shareholder into of the major theatre company of his time - the Globe and the Blackfrairs. Apart from being the shareholder he also possessed property in Stanford as well as London. But the years as they passed by not only brought him success and fortune but also misfortune. In the year 1596, his only son departed for the heavenly abode. In the year 1601, his father too passed away. In the year 1607, his younger brother Edmund who was also an actor died unexpectedly. And as if this was not difficult enough, Shakespeare's mother passed away in the very next year, in 1608.

Sometimes between the year 1610 and 1612, William Shakespeare moved to Stratford. Here he had brought himself the biggest house in the area-new palace. By that time his elder daughter had married Dr. John Hall (the famous physician).And by 1616 Judith married Thomas Quincy. Thomas

Quincy's father was a great friend of Shakespeare. By 1616, Shakespeare's health had completely dwindled and in that year itself on 23rd April his soul departed.

Shakespeare was buried at Holy Trinity Church at Stratford. Seven years after Shakespeare's death, in the year 1623, two actors from the King's company, John Heminge and Henry Condell, published the plays of Shakespeare. This was the first folio. It contains 36 plays and it was sold for 1 pound. Anne Hathaway, the widow of Shakespeare, died in the year 16 23. She was buried beside him in Holy Trinity Church. It is believed that the family line of William Shakespeare came to an end after the death of his granddaughter in the year 1670.

If we leave aside few miscellaneous and ambiguous texts, then Shakespeare can be credited with two narrative poems, these are 'Venus and Adonis' and 'Lucrece'. Both the pieces are comprised of 154 sonnets out of which 126 are addressed to a man and rest are probably addressed to a lady. These sonnets have given rise to innumerable discussions but none of them are concrete nor based on authentic evidences. They indicate about a broken friendship or love (none with any certainty). But one thing that is obviously clear is that the texts talk about extremely refined and beautiful poetry that has transcended beyond time.

In the modern times it is accepted that Shakespeare wrote around 37 plays. But scholars insist that some of these materials are probably collaborative by him and few others are actually him rewriting existing or older materials. But what is sure is that as a dramatist his most productive periods were within the years-1588 to 1612.And that is why we can say without any hesitation that Shakespeare dominated the last phase of the 16th century and early phase of 17th century.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S WORKS CAN BE DIVIDED INTO FOUR DIFFERENT STAGES:

1588 to 1593: This was the beginning of Shakespearean experiments. As an apprentice he learnt the art of improvising and revising the existing pieces. He revised the three parts of Henry VI and Titus Andronicus. It was during this period that he composed his early comedies (under the influence of Lyly). Shakespeare composed Love's Labour's Lost, The Two Gentlemen of Verona, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and The Comedy of Errors during this phase. Under the influence of Marlowe, he tried to experiment with the historical play *Richard II*I. Showcasing his versatility, Shakespeare wrote the young tragedy- *Romeo and Juliet.* The works composed during this period lacks the typical Shakespearean finesse, the characterizations are definitely shallow and overall, they appear to be extremely immature. Moreover, one can definitely witness regular use of puns, a stiff use of blank verse, and rhyming dialogues in the works which were composed during this period.

1594 to 1600: This was a period of chronicle plays and great comedies. The chronicle plays that came around this time were: *Richard II, The Merchant of Venice, Henry IV* (Part 1 & II), King John, and Henry V. The comedies of the period were: The Taming of the Shrew, *Much ado about Nothing, As You Like It, Twelfth Night* and The Merry Wives of Windsor. In these works, Shakespeare shows his craftsmanship as an original composer. None of these plays have any kind of influence from his predecessor. All these works highlight Shakespeare's command over the power of development in

technique. There is an intense and detailed exploration of human motives and passions. The use of prose and blank verse increases gradually while discarding the use of rhymes in dialogues. In fact, the stiffness of blank verse paves way to more lucid and flexible use of the form.

1601 to 1608: This was a period when Shakespeare composed the best of his tragedies. This was also a phase which witnessed some of the serious comedies of Shakespeare. This was the most successful phase of Shakespeare as a playwright. His competency as a dramatist, his intellectual abilities as well as his power of expression has bestowed the literary world with some of the most memorable compositions. But more than creative talent, what is most amusing is to see the way the spirit of Shakespearean work changed. He now seemed to be more interested in the darker side of human experiences. He was solely focused on challenging the existing social moral order. By doing so he manages to show how destructive passion can ruin the lives of both the guilty as well as the innocent together. Most of the plots of Shakespeare's plays composed during this period takes a deep insight into the power of good and evil where the powers of evil are finally questioned upon. He composed *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, All's Well That Ends Well, *Othello, King Lear, Macbeth, Measure for Measure,* Troilus and Cressida, *Coriolanus* and Timon Of Athens during this period.

1608 to 1612: This was the period of later comedies or as we call it dramatic romances. The shifting period is very obvious during this period. It is almost as if the terrible phase of his life has now given way to a more beautiful sunny phase of his life. Unlike the previous period where everything in his fictional world was dark and somber this was a phase which brought in happiness and hope. Even though there is the element of traffic aspect in each of these later plays, one cannot deny that in this place good always prevails the evil. Even the tone and manner are more tender and optimistic in comparison to the previous works. But needless to say, this is also the period which clearly marks the decline of the great playwright that Shakespeare was. The construction is definitely unsatisfactory, the character development is careless, and the style has no resemblance to the powerful impact that the preceding years of his creative talent ahead recorded. Critics now agree that, of the various plays that are credited to Shakespeare during this period, only three of them are solely authored by him: Cymbeline, The *Tempest* and The *Winter's Tale*. And he has definitely co-authored more plays: Pericles and Henry VIII.

If we take into account all the works composed by Shakespeare, it will not be wrong to mention that he probably has contributed the most to the body of literature as a single author. And what makes the most amazing and time immemorial popular writer is his variety. Of course, there have been numerous other authors who have been better than him at some point or other but without a doubt no one has ever been close to him in terms of the vast body of work that he has composed and versatility that he has displayed. Even though slightly imbalanced, there is no denial that he was good with both tragedy as well as comedy. Ingenious spread not only to the stage plays but also in the area of poetry. He was comfortable in imagination as well as delicate fancy. Of course, he was never an original thinker. But he had the power to recreate magic from the material that was available to him in a manner which supported the original writing and managed to attach with it a time immemorial quality.

One of his major strong points was the ability to characterize. It can be safely mentioned that no other author has managed to create so many varieties of characters - both men and women- who never at any point of time felt like a figment of imagination from the authors mind but were probably true and alive.

Many scholars admire the range of vocabulary that Shakespeare places in his works. It is believed that his vocabulary had more than 15000 words whereas even Milton fell short in his comparison.

As of now, all the manuscript plays of Shakespeare are lost. Since Shakespeare himself did not print any of the text we rely on the first print. Even though it must be mentioned here that 16 of his place where published in quarter version during his lifetime itself. But we cannot take it as authentic version because they were all unauthorized editions. As already mentioned the first edition of 1623, (Pericles was omitted in this) is considered to be the first folio edition that came out in print. This one is kind of considered to be the standard and universally accepted version of Shakespearian works. But one of the biggest drawback of this Folio edition is that they are not arranged in chronological order nor the date of the original composition are mentioned in it.

ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

- William Shakespeare was baptized on 26 April 1564. The ceremony took place at Holy Trinity church (Stanford).
- Anne Hathaway was Shakespeare's wife. She was the daughter of a very rich yeoman who hailed from Shottery.
- The poem Venus and Adonis was dedicated to Henry Wriothesley, Third Earl of Southampton.
- 1594 to 1600 was a period of chronicle plays and great comedies written by Shakespeare.

SUMMARY

- William Shakespeare is one of the greatest playwrights of the English language. It is difficult to chronicle the initial period of his life and experience.
- Scholars rely on the existing records and documents to outline and sketch the life of William Shakespeare.
- It is now generally accepted that William Shakespeare was baptized on 26 April 1564. The ceremony took place at Holy Trinity church (Stanford).
- William Shakespeare was born to John Shakespeare and Mary Arden. Mary Arden was the daughter of Robert Arden, who was a farmer by profession.
- We do not have access to any authentic document which highlights the early years of education that William Shakespeare undertook.
- But scholars agree that William Shakespeare must have attended the Grammar School of Stanford where he undertook subjects such as the classics, grammar as well as the literature.
- The plays written by William Shakespeare highlight his knowledge of Latin language. As we all know some of the classical writers like Ovid, Terence, and Plautus et al influenced his writings - both poetry and plays.
- When he was 19 he married Anne Hathaway, who was 26 then. Anne Hathaway was the daughter of a very rich yeoman who hailed from Shottery.
- The couple had three children- Susannah, Judith and Hamnet, the last two were twins.

- There are a number of stories concerning the “lost years” of William Shakespeare.
- But needless, it is believed that a few years after his marriage around 1587 he left his native place and moved to London to explore better avenues.
- This was a period when drama was gaining extreme popularity in London city due to the influence of the University Wits.
- Shakespeare discovered his interest in the stage. He started his stage career as an actor and then he turned his attention towards play writing.
- A pamphlet written by Graham Greene, in the same year, had an oblique reference to him in an inappropriate manner suggesting his elevation to a significant status.
- Shakespeare was buried at Holy Trinity Church at Stratford.
- Seven years after Shakespeare’s death, in the year 1623, two actors from the King’s Company, John Heminge and Henry Condell, published the plays of Shakespeare. This was the First Folio. It contains 36 plays and it was sold for 1 pound.
- If we leave aside few miscellaneous and ambiguous texts, then Shakespeare can be credited with two narrative poems. We have Venus and Adonis and Lucrece.
- In the modern times, it is accepted that Shakespeare wrote around 37 plays.

KEY WORD

Latin: It is the language of ancient Rome and its empire, widely used historically as a language of scholarship and administration.

Curriculum: It refers to the subjects comprising a course of study in a school or college.

Playwright: It refers to a person who writes plays.

SHORT-ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the life and works of William Shakespeare in detail.
2. How did Shakespeare’s childhood impact his writings? What was his source of inspiration?
3. List major works of Shakespeare.

LONG-ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Give a detailed explanation of the four stages of Shakespeare’s works.
2. What do critics have to say about Shakespeare’s works and their relevance in the society through decades?

FURTHER READINGS

1. Wells, Stanley W. 2003. Shakespeare: For All Time. UK: Oxford University Press.
2. Traub, Valerie. 2016. The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment: Gender, Sexuality, and Race. UK: Oxford University PressDK. 2015. The Shakespeare Book: Big Ideas Simply Explained. UK: Dorling Kindersley Ltd.
3. Bloom, Harold. 2009. Shakespeare’s Tragedies. US: Infobase Publishing

BLOCK I
SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS – I

UNIT-I
A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

STRUCTURE

Plot Summary
Character List
Character Analysis
Critical Essays & Major Themes
Critical Essays Major Symbols and Motifs
Study Help Essay Questions

PLOT SUMMARY

A Midsummer Night's Dream opens with Theseus and Hippolyta planning their wedding, which takes place in four days. Theseus is upset because time is moving so slowly, but Hippolyta assures him the four days will quickly pass. Their relationship has not always so loved. Theseus won Hippolyta during a battle.

While they discuss their relationship, Egeus enters with his daughter, Hermia, and her two suitors, Lysander and Demetrius. Hermia is in love with Lysander, but her father wants her to marry Demetrius. Lysander argues that he is as good of a match as Demetrius, but Egeus won't listen. Instead, he declares that if Hermia won't marry Demetrius, she will die: This is the law of Athens and his right as her father. Theseus agrees that Hermia should obey her father but offers her a third option: spending her life in a nunnery. Hermia has until the day of Theseus and Hippolyta's wedding to decide upon her fate.

Upset by Theseus' decree, Lysander comes up with a plan. He and Hermia can escape from Athens and its unjust laws by running away to his widowed aunt's house. Here he and Hermia can marry and live in peace. As they discuss their plans, Helena enters. She is in love with Demetrius and wonders how Hermia managed to capture his heart. Hermia insists she hates Demetrius. She and Lysander then tell Helena about their plan to leave Athens. In a last effort to gain Demetrius' love, Helena decides to tell him of this plot, but she doesn't receive even a "thank you" from her cold-hearted lover.

From the Duke's palace, the scene switches to the cottage of Peter Quince, a carpenter who directs a group of amateur actors in his free time. He has chosen the play "Pyramus and Thisbe" to perform for Theseus' wedding and is in the process of casting roles. Nick Bottom, the weaver, is given the leading role of Pyramus, while Francis Flute, the bellows-mender, and wins the female lead, Thisbe. The remainder of the roles are assigned, and the group plans to meet the following night at the Duke's oak

for a rehearsal — the same woods where Hermia and Lysander plan to meet on their flight from Athens.

The action of the play now shifts to these fairy-enchanted woods, where Puck, Oberon's joker, speaks with one of Titania's fairies. The fairy recognizes Puck as the troublemaker, Robin Good fellow. They also discuss the argument between Titania and Oberon; Oberon is angry with Titania because she refuses to give him the Indian boy she is raising. While Puck and the fairy talk, Titania and Oberon enter from opposite ends of the stage. After criticizing each other's infidelities — Titania was supposedly in love with Theseus and Oberon with Hippolyta, among others — Titania reminds Oberon that their argument has led to chaos in the natural world. Oberon says this disaster will end if she relinquishes the Indian boy, but Titania refuses. Oberon hatches a sneaky plan to get the boy back. He sends Puck out to find a plant called love-in-idleness, the juice of which makes any person dote on the next creature he or she sees.

While Puck is out looking for this magical flower, Demetrius and Helena wander past Oberon. As usual, Demetrius insists Helena stop following him; he even vows to harm her if she doesn't leave him alone. Taking pity on Helena, Oberon instructs Puck to put some love juice in Demetrius' eyes at a moment when Helena will be the first person he sees upon waking.

Titania and her fairies are the next to enter the stage, with Oberon secretly following. When Titania falls asleep, Oberon squeezes the love juice in her eyes, hoping a wild beast will be the first creature she sees upon waking. In the meantime, Hermia and Lysander wander near Titania's bower. Lost in the woods, they decide to stop and rest until morning. Puck sees Lysander asleep and assumes he is the nasty Athenian Oberon told him about. He puts the love juice in Lysander's eyes. Still in pursuit of Demetrius, Helena wanders past and notices the sleeping Lysander. She awakens him, and he immediately falls in love with her. Cautious and heartbroken, Helena assumes Lysander is teasing her, so she runs away. Lysander follows. Hermia awakens, calling out for Lysander's help, because she has just had a nightmare in which a snake ate her heart. She dashes into the woods in search of Lysander.

Quince, Bottom, and the other actors are the next characters to meander near Titania's bower. As they rehearse "Pyramus and Thisbe," Puck secretly listens, appalled by their awful acting. Deciding Bottom is the worst in the bunch, Puck gives him an ass-head. When Bottom saunters out of the woods to deliver his lines, the other actors fly from him in fear. Bottom is unaware of the transformation and walks unworriedly through the woods. Singing as he passes her bower, Bottom awakens Titania who immediately falls in love with him.

Puck explains all of these events to Oberon, who is pleased with the way his plan has turned out. Indeed, everything seems perfect, until Demetrius and Hermia walk past, Hermia believing Demetrius has harmed Lysander, who has mysteriously disappeared. Oberon realizes that Puck has anointed the wrong Athenian with the love juice. Angry with this mistake, Oberon sends Puck in search of Helena, vowing to charm Demetrius' eyes when she appears. Now both Lysander and Demetrius are in love with Helena, adding much to Puck's amusement at the foolishness of mortals. Helena still believes they are teasing her. When Hermia honestly, and confusedly, says she knows nothing about the sudden switch

in Lysander's feelings, Helena believes she is simply playing dumb: In her opinion, her three friends are laughing at her.

Before a serious fight breaks out between Demetrius and Lysander, Oberon has Puck create a fog that will keep the lovers from finding one another. While they're sleeping, Puck reverses the spell on Lysander. He also casts a spell so none of the lovers will remember what has happened in the woods. In the meantime, Oberon returns to Titania's bower in search of the Indian boy. Titania willingly releases him because she only has eyes for Bottom. Oberon's plan is now complete, and he is disgusted to see his queen in love with an ass, so he releases her from the spell.

Titania awakens and tells Oberon about her strange dream of being in love with an ass. Oberon has Puck remove the ass-head from Bottom. Now that Oberon has won the Indian boy from Titania, he is willing to forget their argument, and the two, reunited, dance off together so they can bless Theseus' marriage.

Morning has arrived and Theseus, Hippolyta, and Egeus are walking through the woods. Theseus suddenly spies the sleeping lovers and imagines they woke early to observe the rite of May. When the lovers are awakened, Demetrius confesses that he now loves Helena. Theseus decides the other lovers should be married along with him and Hippolyta. As they return to the palace, the scene shifts to Bottom. Just awakening from his dream, Bottom declares he'll have Quince write a ballad about it, called "Bottom's Dream," because it has no bottom.

Quince and the other actors haven't forgotten their missing friend, Bottom. They worry "Pyramus and Thisbe" won't be able to go on without him, which saddens them because Theseus is known for his generosity, and they might have been rewarded with a lifelong pension for their performance. As they lament this lost opportunity, Bottom suddenly returns. His friends want to hear his story, but Bottom tells them there isn't time for that: They must prepare for the play.

In the final scene, the play has come full circle, and all of the cast returns to the palace where Theseus and Hippolyta discuss the strange tale the lovers have told them about the events of the previous evening. The joyous lovers enter, and Theseus decides it is time to plan the festivities for the evening. Of all the possible performances, the play "Pyramus and Thisbe" turns out to be the most promising. Theseus is intrigued by the paradoxical summary of the play, which suggests it is merry and tragical, tedious and brief. The players finally present their play. Hippolyta is disgusted by their pathetic acting, but Theseus argues that even the best actors create only a brief illusion; the worst must be assisted by an imaginative audience. The play ends with Puck's final speech, in which he apologizes for the weakness of the performance and promises that the next production will be better.

CHARACTER LIST

THESEUS

Duke of Athens, who is marrying Hippolyta as the play begins. He decrees that Hermia must marry Demetrius or be sentenced either to death or to life in a convent. At the end of the play, he insists that all of the lovers

marry along with him and Hipploeyta and provides a humorous commentary to accompany the performance of "Pyramus and Thisbe."

HIPPOLYTA

Queen of the Amazons, she is betrothed to Theseus. These two were once enemies, and Theseus won her in battle. In this play, she seems to have lost much of her fighting spirit, though she does not hesitate to voice her opinion, for example, following Theseus' choice of the play "Pyramus and Thisbe."

LYSANDER

Hermia's beloved. Egeus does not approve of Lysander, though we don't know why. Lysander claims to be Demetrius' equal, and the play supports this claim — the differences between the two lovers are negligible, if not non-existent — yet Egeus insists Hermia marry Demetrius. Rather than lose his lover in this random way, Lysander plans to escape with her to his widowed aunt's home. During a night in the forest, Lysander is mistakenly doused by Puck with Oberon's love juice, causing him to fall briefly in love with Helena. Realizing the mistake, Oberon makes Puck reverse the spell, so by the end of the play, Lysander and Hermia are once again in love and marry.

DEMETRIUS

He is in love with Hermia, and her father's choice of a husband for her. Similar to Lysander in most ways, Demetrius' only distinguishing characteristic is his fickleness in love. He once loved Helena but has cruelly abandoned her before the play begins. Not only does he reject Helena's deep love for him, but he vows to hurt, even rape, her if she doesn't leave him alone. With the help of Oberon's love juice, he relinquishes Hermia and marries Helena at the end of the play. Demetrius is the only character who is permanently affected by Oberon's love juice.

HERMIA

Although she loves Lysander, her father insists she marry Demetrius or be put to death for disobedience of his wishes. Theseus softens this death sentence, declaring that Hermia choose Demetrius, death, or life in a convent. Rather than accept this dire fate, Hermia agrees to run away with Lysander. During the chaotic night in the woods, Hermia is shocked to see her beloved abandon her and declare his love for Helena. She is unaware of the mischief Oberon's love juice is playing with Lysander's vision. By the play's end, Puck has reversed the spell, and Lysander's true love for Hermia has been restored. Despite her father's continued opposition to their union, the two marry with Theseus' blessing.

HELENA

She is the cruelly abused lover of Demetrius. Before the play begins, he has abandoned her in favor of Hermia. Helena doesn't understand the reason for his switch in affection, because she is as

beautiful as Hermia. Desperate to win him back, Helena tries anything, even betraying Hermia, her best childhood friend, by revealing to the jealous Demetrius Lysander and Hermia's plan to escape Athens. With the help of Oberon's love juice, Demetrius finally falls back in love with Helena, and the two are married at the end of the play.

OBERON

The King of the Fairies, Oberon is fighting with Titania when the play begins because he wants custody of an Indian boy she is raising. He hatches a plan to win the boy away from her by placing love juice in her eyes. This juice causes her to fall rashly in love with Bottom. During her magic-induced love affair, Oberon convinces her to relinquish the boy, who Oberon will use as a page. Once he has the boy, Oberon releases Titania from her spell, and the two lovers are reunited. Oberon also sympathizes with Helena and has Puck place love juice in Demetrius' eyes so he falls in love with her. After Puck mistakenly anoints Lysander, Oberon insists Puck fix his mistake so that the true lovers are together by the end of the play. In the final scene, he and Titania bless all of the newlyweds.

TITANIA

Oberon's wife, she is Queen of the Fairies. Because of Titania's argument with Oberon, the entire human and natural world is in chaos. Oberon wants the Indian boy she is protecting, but Titania refuses to give him up because when his mother died in childbirth, she agreed to raise the boy. Following Oberon's application of the love juice to her eyes, Titania falls in love with Bottom, and Oberon takes the Indian boy from her. Once he has the boy, Oberon releases the spell, and he and Titania are reunited.

PUCK (or) ROBIN GOODFELLOW

Oberon's jester, Puck is responsible for mistakenly anointing Lysander with the love juice intended for Demetrius. Puck enjoys the comedy that ensues when Lysander and Demetrius are both in love with Helena but follows Oberon's orders to reunite the correct lovers. Puck has the final words of the play, emphasizing that the entire play was just a dream.

NICK BOTTOM

A weaver, Bottom plays Pyramus. He is the most outgoing of the group of actors, wishing to play all of the characters in "Pyramus and Thisbe." Puck transforms him into an ass, and Titania falls in love with him. When Puck returns Bottom to his normal self, Bottom can't speak about what happened to him but vows to have Peter Quince write about it in a ballad to be called "Bottom's Dream."

EGEUS

Hermia's tyrannical father, He capriciously declares that she must marry Demetrius or be put to death for disobedience; according to the law

of Athens, daughters must obey their fathers or forfeit their lives. At the end of the play, he is shocked to learn that Lysander and Hermia tried to flee Athens and insists they should be punished. Theseus overrules him, making the lovers marry instead.

PHILOSTRATE

Theseus' Master of Revels, he arranges the selection of performances for Theseus' wedding. He tries to dissuade the wedding party from choosing "Pyramus and Thisbe" but is overruled by Theseus.

PETER QUINCE

A carpenter and the director of the group of actors who perform "Pyramus and Thisbe," which he has written for the celebration following Theseus and Hippolyta's wedding.

FRANCIS FLUTE

A bellows-mender, Flute plays the role of Thisbe. He is displeased to be given a woman's role because he wants to let his beard grow, but Quince assures him that he can play the part in a mask.

TOM SNOUT

Snout is a tinker and plays the role of Wall in "Pyramus and Thisbe."

SNUG

A joiner, he plays the lion in "Pyramus and Thisbe."

ROBIN STARVELING

A tailor, he represents Moonshine in "Pyramus and Thisbe."
Pease blossom, Cobweb, Moth, Mustard seed Titania's fairies.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

HERMIA

Critics often recognize the similarity between Hermia and Helena because both represent the difficulties of adolescent love. But these two young women are more different than their male counterparts, Lysander and Demetrius, who are, indeed, indistinguishable. Not only do these two young women show the trials and tribulations of young love, but their interactions emphasize the importance of female friendship and the gender expectations that often make women's lives difficult. As the play opens, Hermia is under trial. Her father insists she marry Demetrius, the man he prefers, rather than Lysander, the man she loves. Her father reminds the audience that Hermia has no choice in this matter: Hermia is his property,

and the laws declare he can dispose of her as he wishes, even if this means sending her to her death. Theseus agrees: According to him, Hermia's father should be a god to her. She is merely a form in wax that has been imprinted with her father's power. Even though Theseus offers her the choice of living in a nunnery rather than dying, he won't allow her to make her own decision about a husband. Her "fancy" conflicts with her father's "will," emphasizing that an adolescent girl has no power against the will of law.

Later in the play, Hermia is criticized for her being "dark," an Ethiope, in contrast with "light" Helena's blondeness. Hermia's "darkness" is significant, reminding us of the racial slurs that continue to plague our culture. Similarly, her fears that Lysander has abandoned her because she's shorter than Helena show that body image issues aren't a recent problem for women: Even in the sixteenth century, women equated build with desirability, often discovering themselves on the short end of this stick. Hermia's belief that Lysander has deserted her because of her body type also emphasizes the fickleness of love, which is often based not on deep features of character, but on trivial aspects of appearance.

Helena

Obsessed over Demetrius, Helena's character emphasizes the capriciousness of love and its excesses. Even though she knows she is making a fool of herself by pursuing Demetrius, Helena cannot stop the chase. She reminds us that love is blind, declaring that she is as beautiful as Hermia, so there is no logical explanation for Demetrius' sudden shift in affection. This point is further emphasized by the two men's love potion-induced attraction for her. Through these interactions, we learn that love is blind, illogical, seemingly produced by magic's sleight-of-hand, rather than reason's honesty. Like a child, lovers are often beguiled by trivial trinkets rather than deep character traits. This message is further heightened by the blandness of Lysander and Demetrius. As Lysander makes clear in his conversation with Egeus in Act I, no noticeable differences exist between the two men, so Helena could just as easily love one as the other.

Besides emphasizing love's arbitrary nature, Helena also highlights the gender differences that vex women. Unlike men who can woo whomever they please, women are not allowed to fight for love; instead, they must passively wait for the man of their dreams to notice them. In chasing Demetrius through the woods, Helena is breaking the rules of her sex, becoming the pursuer rather than the pursued. She likens herself to Apollo who chased the unwilling huntress Daphne through the woods. Helena's choice of examples is significant because it emphasizes the violence men (or gods in this case) have often perpetrated against women: Apollo wanted not only to capture Daphne, but to rape her. In chasing Demetrius, Helena claims to have appropriated Apollo's role, yet Demetrius is still the one who threatens violence when he vows to "do [her] mischief in the wood" if she doesn't stop following him. Not only must woman patiently wait for her chosen lover to call, but she is also constantly threatened by male sexual violence if she resists unwanted male attentions.

What recourse do women have? Banding together. Thus, Helena is upset when she believes Hermia has betrayed her by joining Demetrius and Lysander. Childhood friendships between women should be stronger than the fickle love of men. Her comments make us question the position of all women in the play. For example, what is the source of Hippolyta's

passivity in the play? Like Daphne, she has been captured and ravished by a male warrior. Did she lose her power when she lost the society of other women? And what about Titania? Why isn't she angry upon discovering that Oberon has charmed her and stolen her precious Indian boy? By focusing on these instances of male violence, the play implicitly suggests that women should become more active. Notice that Helena, who has actively pursued Demetrius, is rewarded for her proactive pursuit.

BOTTOM

Probably created as a showcase for one of Shakespeare's favorite actors, Bottom's role involves dancing, singing, and laughter. From his first introduction, Bottom is presented as courageous and outgoing. He is confident in his ability to play any, even all, roles in "Pyramus and Thisbe." For example, he says his performance of Pyramus will cause the audience to cry a storm load of tears. As the audience realizes, this confidence is misplaced, and Bottom is little more than a swaggering fool — indeed, an ass, as Puck's prank makes apparent.

Bottom's language adds to his comic appeal. For example, he claims that if he performed the role of Thisbe, he would speak her lines in a "monstrous little voice," an obviously contradictory statement. Then he would "aggravate" his voice if he played the lion's role so that the ladies in the audience would not be frightened; once again, Bottom's word choices show his silliness, while adding a comic element to the play. Similarly, rather than worry about his acting performance, Bottom wonders which beard would be most effective for the role of Pyramus.

Although Bottom is the locus of comedy in the play — he's a traditional Shakespearean clown — he also draws the audience's attention to serious themes, such as the relationship between reality and imagination. In preparing for the performance of "Pyramus and Thisbe," Bottom continually draws his fellow players' attention back to the question of the audience's gullibility: Will the ladies be upset when Pyramus kills himself; will they realize that the lion is not a lion but an actor? To remedy the first problem, Bottom asks Quince to write a prologue, explaining Pyramus is not really dead, and that Pyramus is not, in fact, Pyramus, but Bottom the weaver. In this instance, Bottom focuses the audience's attention on the difficulty of differentiating reality and perception; his solution suggests his belief that the players' acting will be too convincing, that they will fully realize the goal of theatre. Similarly, to keep the ladies from being afraid of the lion, he suggests the actor playing the lion show half of his face and explain that he's really a man, not an animal. This belief in the power of theatre extends to his solutions for bringing moonshine and a wall into the play. In creating a wall for the set, he believes covering a man with plaster and some loam will sufficiently convince an audience. Always ready to be surprised, to accept the world's wonder, Bottom believes his audience will be equally susceptible to the powers of art.

Bottom's openness to the world's oddities extends to his visit to the fairy realm, which could be viewed as simply another fantasy, much like the theatre. It is ironic that Bottom, the most down-to-earth character in the play, is the only mortal who meets any of the fairies. When Titania falls in love with him, Bottom isn't surprised. But he does recognize that Titania's statements about him aren't true, for example that he is an angel or that his

looks inspire confidence. At bottom, he knows love and reason don't often work at the same level. Once again, his comments focus on a key, recurring theme of the play: How do love and reason relate? Should love be based on reason or on fantasy? In addition, Bottom's interactions with Titania emphasize the class differences between the characters in the play; as a member of the artisan class, Bottom was literally in a different realm from the regal **Queen of the Fairies.**

When he returns to the real world, following his stay in the fairy world, Bottom would like to discuss his experiences. He can't. Although he usually is full of language, he is unable to speak about his fairy-inspired visions. Instead, he wants Peter Quince to write a ballad about these experiences; what ordinary language cannot accommodate, poetic language can. Unlike Theseus, Bottom has complete faith in the power of art to capture visionary experiences. Through him, Shakespeare implicitly validates the vision of the artist.

Puck

Oberon's jester and lieutenant, Puck is a powerful supernatural creature, capable of circling the globe in 40 minutes or of enshrouding unsuspecting mortals in a deep fog. Also known as Robin Good fellow, Puck would have been familiar to a sixteenth-century English audience, who would have recognized him as a common household spirit also often associated with travellers. But he's also a "puck," an elf or goblin that enjoys playing practical jokes on mortals. Although he is more mischievous than malevolent, Puck reminds us that the fairy world is not all goodness and generosity.

Another definition of his name aligns him with a Norse demon, sometimes associated with the devil. Perhaps it isn't surprising that he brings a somewhat more dangerous element to Titania and Oberon's seemingly benevolent fairy realm. He invokes the "damned spirits" that wander home to graveyards after a night of evil doing, while Oberon reminds him that his band of fairies are aligned with the morning dew, with sunlight and joy. Unlike Oberon who genuinely tries to create human happiness, Puck seems indifferent to human suffering. When he has accidentally caused both Lysander and Demetrius to fall in love with Helena, Puck enjoys the pleasure their folly brings him. Although he restores the proper lovers to each other, he does so only at Oberon's request, not out of any feelings of remorse. Similarly, Oberon feels repentance for Titania's idiotic love for Bottom, but Puck doesn't. While Oberon and Titania bless the newlyweds in Act V, Puck reminds the audience of the dangers of the night, graves gaping open and wolves howling at the moon. As a traditional Shakespearean fool, Puck makes us aware of the darker side of life, the underworld realm of shadows and magic and, ultimately, death.

OBERON

The King of the Fairies, Oberon's personality has two sides. On the one hand, he ensures that the proper lovers end up together by the end of the play. He sympathizes with the sorely abused Helena and causes Demetrius to fall madly in love with her. As a benevolent ruler of the spirit world, he also brings blessing of peace and health to the future families of the newlyweds. But his personality is not all kindness; Oberon shows a more malicious side in his dealings with Titania.

Their initial interaction in the play begins with a fight. The dual has been brought about by Titania's possession of an Indian boy. While Titania appears to be legitimately raising this child, the only son of one of her votresses who died in childbirth, Oberon has decided he wants the boy as a servant. Why? Shakespeare never tells us. Perhaps Oberon wants to prove his male authority over Titania; perhaps he feels Titania is overindulging the boy and would like to bring discipline into his life. Any explanation the audience comes up with must be based in conjecture, because Shakespeare does not explain Oberon's motivation. No explanation, though, would seem to justify the cruelty Oberon uses in winning the boy away from Titania. Oberon casts a spell upon her, a trick that leaves her in love with Bottom, the ass. Many critics recognize Oberon's kindness in releasing her from this spell as soon as he has gotten what he wanted from her — the boy — but his treachery must still be acknowledged.

THESEUS

Like Oberon, Theseus is a contradictory character. On the one hand, he is the ruler of Athens and represents the voice of law and authority in the mortal realm, paralleling Oberon's similar position in the fairy world. His duty as dispenser of justice is seen early in the play through his interaction with Hermia and Egeus. Although Theseus is more understanding of Hermia's situation than her father, he still vows to sentence her to death if she won't accept one of his two alternatives: marrying Demetrius or entering a convent. Even when Hippolyta is noticeably upset with his verdict, Theseus insists that a daughter's first goal must be to obey her father. As upholder of authority in Athens, Theseus' first duty is to support the city's laws, even when they appear unfair.

Based on this example, Theseus' view of love would seem to fit within the boundaries of law and reason. This notion is supported by his speech at the beginning of Act V, in which he famously announces that the imaginations of poets, madmen, and lovers are all the same: All are prone to excesses beyond the realm of reason. But isn't Theseus also a lover? His statement seems to discount his own position as lover of Hippolyta; as a reasonable man, does he qualify as a lover? Yet even the rational Theseus claims time moves too slowly as he anticipates his wedding day, showing his unreasonable longing. But his love for Hippolyta is not the pure, fresh, freely chosen affection of Hermia and Lysander. As Theseus reminds his bride, he won her by doing her harm: She was part of the spoils of war. In their quarrel, Oberon and Titania tell us this is not the first relationship for either Hippolyta or Theseus. Not only has Theseus' name been linked with Titania's, but he has supposedly ravished and deserted Perigouna, Ariadne, and Antiope, among others. Similarly, Hippolyta has been the "buskin'd mistress" of Oberon and has spent time with Hercules and Cadmus. Not lovers in their first bloom, Theseus and Hippolyta offer a picture of more mature love.

Theseus' famous speech from Act V also appears to denigrate the poet's imaginative faculty by aligning him with lovers and madmen. He argues that the poet "gives to airy nothing / A local habitation and a name," a trick performed by strong imaginations. His theory denies the importance of craft and discipline in the creation of art, casting artistic talent as little more than airy fantasy. In choosing a play for the wedding festivities, he does not select the most skillful performers, but those who present their art

with simplicity, duty, and modesty. While Hippolyta dislikes the silly performance of the players, Theseus argues that both good and bad actors create but "shadows," and the audience must flesh out the performances through their own imaginations. Overall, Theseus' view of imagination minimizes the work of the artist, placing more responsibility on the audience.

CRITICAL ESSAYS & MAJOR THEMES

Explore the different themes within William Shakespeare's comedic play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Themes are central to understanding *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a play and identifying Shakespeare's social and political commentary.

LOVE

The dominant theme in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is love, a subject to which Shakespeare returns constantly in his comedies. Shakespeare explores how people tend to fall in love with those who appear beautiful to them. People we think we love at one time in our lives can later seem not only unattractive but even repellent. For a time, this attraction to beauty might appear to be love at its most intense, but one of the ideas of the play is that real love is much more than mere physical attraction.

At one level, the story of the four young Athenians asserts that although "The course of true love never did run smooth," true love triumphs in the end, bringing happiness and harmony. At another level, however, the audience is forced to consider what an apparently irrational and whimsical thing love is, at least when experienced between youngsters.

MARRIAGE

A Midsummer Night's Dream asserts marriage as the true fulfilment of romantic love. All the damaged relationships have been sorted out at the end of Act IV, and Act V serves to celebrate the whole idea of marriage in a spirit of festive happiness.

The triple wedding at the end of Act IV marks the formal resolution of the romantic problems that have beset the two young couples from the beginning, when Egeus attempted to force his daughter to marry the man he had chosen to be her husband.

The mature and stable love of Theseus and Hippolyta is contrasted with the relationship of Oberon and Titania, whose squabbling has such a negative impact on the world around them. Only when the marriage of the fairy King and Queen is put right can there be peace in their kingdom and the world beyond it.

APPEARANCE AND REALITY

Another of the play's main themes is one to which Shakespeare returns to again and again in his work: the difference between appearance and reality. The idea that things are not necessarily what they seem to be is at the heart of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and in the very title itself.

A dream is not real, even though it seems so at the time we experience it. Shakespeare consciously creates the plays' dreamlike quality in a number of ways. Characters frequently fall asleep and wake having dreamed ("Me thought a serpent ate my heart away"); having had magic worked upon them so that they are in a dreamlike state; or thinking that they have dreamed ("I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what dream it was"). Much of the play takes place at night, and there are references to moonlight, which changes the appearance of what it illuminates.

The difference between appearances and reality is also explored through the play-within-a-play, to particularly comic effect. The "rude mechanicals" completely fail to understand the magic of the theatre, which depends upon the audience being allowed to believe (for a time, at least) that what is being acted out in front of them is real.

When Snug the Joiner tells the stage audience that he is not really a lion and that they must not be afraid of him, we (and they) laugh at this stupidity, but we also laugh at ourselves — for we know that he is not just a joiner pretending to be a lion, but an actor pretending to be a joiner pretending to be a lion. Shakespeare seems to be saying, "We all know that this play isn't real, but you're still sitting there and believing it." That is a kind of magic too.

ORDER AND DISORDER

A Midsummer Night's Dream also deals with the theme of order and disorder. The order of Egeus' family is threatened because his daughter wishes to marry against his will; the social order to the state demands that a father's will should be enforced. When the city dwellers find themselves in the wood, away from their ordered and hierarchical society, order breaks down and relationships are fragmented. But this is comedy, and relationships are more happily rebuilt in the free atmosphere of the wood before the characters return to society.

Natural order — the order of Nature — is also broken and restored in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The row between the Fairy King and Queen results in the order of the seasons being disrupted:

The spring, the summer,
The chiding autumn, angry winter change
Their wonted liveries, and the mazèd world
By their increase knows not which is which.

Only after Oberon and Titania's reconciliation can all this be put right. Without the restoration of natural order, the happiness of the play's ending could not be complete.

CRITICAL ESSAYS MAJOR SYMBOLS AND MOTIFS

Explore the different symbols and motifs within William Shakespeare's comedic play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Symbols and motifs are key to understanding *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and identifying Shakespeare's social and political commentary.

THE MOON

The dominant imagery in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* revolves around the moon and moonlight. The word moon occurs three times in the play's first nine lines of the play, the last of these three references in a most striking visual image: "the moon, like to a silver bow / New bent in heaven." One reason for repeating such images is to create the atmosphere of night.

Shakespeare's plays were mostly performed by daylight, and he had to create the idea of darkness or half-light in the imagination of his audience — there were no lights to turn off or to dim. In addition, these repeated moon references work upon the audience by creating a dreamlike atmosphere. Familiar things look different by moonlight; they are seen quite literally in a different light.

The moon itself is also a reminder of the passage of time, and that all things — like its phases — must change. The more educated people in Shakespeare's audience would have also understood the mythological significance of the moon. The moon-goddesses Luna and Diana were associated with chastity on the one hand and fertility on the other; two qualities that are united in faithful marriage, which the play celebrates.

ANIMALS

Animal images also appear many times in the play, reminding us of the wildness of the woods in which most of the play's action takes place, where an unaccompanied female would be at "the mercy of wild beasts" in a setting where "the wolf be howls the moon." But this is a comedy; these dangers are not really threatening. The animal references are stylized and conventional. The only physical animals encountered by the characters (apart from Starveling's dog) are the less-than-half-ass Nick Bottom and the totally artificial Lion played by Snug.

The animal references are included in the many images of the natural world that are associated with the fairy kingdom. These details emphasize the pretty delicacy of the fairies themselves and make the wood seem more real in the imagination of the audience. Oberon's "I know a bank" speech in Act II, Scene I is just one example of this.

STUDY HELP ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. What is the significance of the settings of the play? What are the major characteristics of each setting (the Duke's palace, Quince's cottage, and the fairy-enchanted woods)? What significance do forests have in other literary works you're familiar with? What about urban settings? What rules and values apply in the different settings? Why is the story set in ancient Greece — would it have been as effective in contemporary England?

2. Discuss the meanings of the play's title, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In addition to the title, what other references do you find to dreaming in the play? What relationship is created between dreaming and theater (look, for example, at Puck's final speech)? Why is Midsummer important to the themes of the play?

3. The play presents several different couples: Theseus and Hippolyta,; Hermia and Lysander, Helena and Demetrius, Titania and Bottom, and Titania and Oberon. What aspects of love are explored in each of these relationships?

4. Gender issues are significant in this drama. What differences are there in the roles and behaviors appropriate to men and women? Do these gender differences still exist today, or are they examples of outdated stereotypes?

5. Many contemporary productions of the play cast the same actor in the role of Theseus and Oberon, and also of Hippolyta and Titania. What does this suggest about the functions of these characters in the play? How are the Hippolyta and Titania similar and/or different? Theseus and Oberon?

6. The adventures of the four young lovers — Demetrius, Lysander, Helena and Hermia — are a necessary aspect of the play, yet many critics have suggested that these four characters are "indistinguishable." Do you agree? What similarities and differences do you find among their personalities? Do you have a favorite among this group?

7. Much has been written about the darker side of this play, its savage, erotic aspects and its violence. For example, the critic Jan Kott finds the eroticism of the play "brutal." On the other hand, the critic Hartley Coleridge says this drama is "all poetry, and sweeter poetry was never written." Which of these critics do you agree with — if either? Overall, is this a sinister, violent, erotic play or a lighthearted, romantic comedy? Support your answer with references from the text.

UNIT II
AS YOU LIKE IT

STRUCTURE

Play Summary
Character List
Character Analysis
The Natural and the Artificial in *As You Like It*
Study Help Essay Questions

PLAY SUMMARY

Orlando, the youngest son of the now deceased Sir Roland de Boys, complains to Adam, the old family retainer, that his eldest brother, Oliver, has kept his Inheritance from him — that is, Oliver has neglected training Orlando to be a proper gentleman. Oliver arrives on the scene, and a bitter quarrel takes place. Adam parts the fighting brothers, and Oliver coldly promises to give Orlando his due. Learning that Orlando intends to challenge Duke Frederick's champion wrestler, a brute of a man called Charles, Oliver makes plans to have his brother killed in the ring. He convinces the slow-witted Charles that Orlando is plotting against him and that Orlando should be killed.

At the match the next day, Duke Frederick, his daughter Celia, and his niece, Rosalind, watch Charles and Orlando wrestle. Charles has seriously injured his first three opponents, but in the match with Orlando, the young man's great speed and agility defeat the duke's champion. At first, Frederick is very cordial to Orlando, but when he learns the youth's identity, he becomes furious and leaves. The reason for the duke's leaving is that Orlando's dead father, Sir Roland de Boys, had at one time been Frederick's bitter enemy. Celia and Rosalind congratulate Orlando, and Rosalind makes it clear that she finds him most attractive. Orlando returns her feelings, but he is so tongue-tied with embarrassment that he can say nothing.

At the ducal palace, we discover that Celia and her cousin Rosalind are as close as sisters; Rosalind is the daughter of the rightful duke, Duke Senior, whose throne has been usurped by his brother, Frederick. Frederick has banished Duke Senior, along with a band of his faithful followers, to the Forest of Arden to live the life of simple foresters. Until now, it is only the strong bond between Rosalind and Celia that prevents Duke Frederick from sending Rosalind away to share her father's exile. But suddenly, Frederick storms into the palace, accuses Rosalind of plotting against him, and, despite Celia's pleas for her cousin, banishes Rosalind. After her father leaves, Celia decides to go into exile with her cousin, and the girls set out for the Forest of Arden — Rosalind disguised as a young man, "Ganymede," and Celia disguised as a young country lass, "Aliena." Touchstone, Frederick's jester, accompanies them.

Meanwhile, Orlando returns home and is warned by the faithful Adam that Oliver is plotting to kill him. Together, they too decide to set out for the Forest of Arden, hoping that they will find safety there.

When his daughter Celia is missed, Frederick sends his men out to find Orlando. When he is informed of Orlando's flight to the Forest of Arden, Frederick assumes that Orlando is responsible for Celia's disappearance, and in a rage he sends for Oliver and commands him to find Orlando or else forfeit his entire estate to Frederick.

In the forest, Orlando and Adam join Rosalind's exiled father and his men, while Rosalind and Celia, still in disguise, and purchase a little cottage and a small herd of sheep and settle down to a peaceful, pastoral existence. One day, however, Rosalind finds that the trees in the forest are all covered with sheets of poetry, dedicated to her. The author of these poems, of course, is Orlando. So, still pretending to be the young man Ganymede, Rosalind meets Orlando, who is in the throes of love-sickness for having apparently lost Rosalind. Ganymede offers to cure Orlando of his love-sickness by pretending to be his lady-love, Rosalind. Orlando, she says, should woo Ganymede as though "he" were Rosalind. In turn, Ganymede will do "his best" to act as moody and capricious as a girl might just do and, eventually, Orlando will weary of all the coy teasing and forget all about love — and Rosalind. Orlando agrees to try the plan.

Rosalind, meanwhile, continues to assume the guise of Ganymede and becomes accidentally involved in yet another complication: Silvius, a young shepherd, falls in love with Phebe, a hard-hearted shepherdess, but Phebe rejects Silvius' attentions and falls in love with the young, good-looking Ganymede.

In the midst of all this confusion, Oliver arrives in the Forest of Arden. He tells Ganymede of a near escape he has just had with death. His brother, Orlando, he says, saved him from being poisoned by a deadly snake as he slept, and later, Orlando killed a lioness that was ready to pounce on Oliver. Oliver then tells Ganymede that he has been sent to this part of the forest to seek out a young man known as Ganymede and tell him that Orlando cannot keep his appointment with him. And there is more news: while saving Oliver's life, Orlando was wounded. Hearing this, Ganymede swoons.

Later, in another part of the forest, Oliver and Celia meet and fall in love at first sight, and the jester, Touchstone, falls in love with a homely, simple-minded young woman named Audrey, who tends a herd of goats. Touchstone chases off Audrey's suitor, a lout named William, and although he realizes that he will never instil in Audrey any understanding of, or love for, such things as poetry, he still feels that he must have her.

Duke Frederick, meanwhile, is alarmed by the daily exodus of so many of the best men of his court to the alliance that is growing in the Forest of Arden; he therefore decides to journey to the forest himself and put a stop to all this business. At the forest's edge, however, he meets an old religious hermit and is miraculously converted.

At this point, Rosalind, still disguised as Ganymede, promises to solve the problems of everyone by magic. Shedding her male attire in private, she suddenly appears as herself, and the play comes to a swift close as she and Orlando, Oliver and Celia, Silvius and Phebe, and Touchstone and Audrey are married. Rosalind's father, the rightful duke, is joyous at finding his daughter again and is returned to his ducal status. Frederick's conversion is so complete that he renounces the world. At the end of the play, Rosalind comes forward and addresses the audience in a short but charming epilogue. In particular, she talks to all the lovers in the audience and wishes them well.

CHARACTER LIST

ORLANDO DE BOYS

This young Englishman is noble and pure of heart. His constant concern and care for Adam, the old family servant, immediately makes the audience esteem him. When he learns that his brother Oliver is planning to kill him, he leaves home and goes to the Forest of Arden with old Adam. In the forest, he attaches love poems addressed to Rosalind on all the trees. Finally, he and Rosalind are united and wed.

OLIVER DE BOYS

He is supposed to teach his younger brother Orlando to be a gentleman, but he does not do so; he is a treacherous youth and tries to have Orlando killed. Orlando, however, saves him from being killed by a deadly snake and, later, from a fierce lioness, and finally the two brothers are reconciled. Oliver eventually falls in love with Celia.

JAQUES DE BOYS

Like Oliver and Orlando, he is one of the sons of the late Sir Roland de Boys. He is favoured by Oliver over Orlando, and he is sent away to school to learn how to be a proper gentleman. At the end of the play, he appears onstage and announces that the corrupt Duke Frederick has been converted to a life of goodness by an old hermit.

DUKE FREDERICK

The "villain" of this comedy, he banishes his elder brother, and eventually he also exiles his brother's daughter, Rosalind, from the ducal palace. Just before the play ends, he is converted by a religious hermit, and, henceforward, he chooses to lead a monastic life in the Forest of Arden.

ROSALIND

She is the most realistic and sympathetic character in the play. She falls in love with Orlando and shortly thereafter is exiled from the ducal court by Frederick. Accompanied by Celia and Touchstone, she goes to the Forest of Arden disguised as a young man, Ganymede. In the forest, she is wooed by Orlando, who is unaware that she is, in reality, his beloved Rosalind.

CELIA

She is Rosalind's cousin and closest friend. When Rosalind is exiled by Celia's father, Celia accompanies Rosalind to the Forest of Arden. Since Celia isn't in love at the time, her practical answers to

Rosalind's queries about love help to explore the depth of Rosalind's love for Orlando. Celia goes to the forest disguised as Aliena. Eventually she meets Orlando's brother Oliver and falls in love with him.

TOUCHSTONE

The court clown, he accompanies Rosalind and Celia to the Forest of Arden. There he falls in love with Audrey, a country woman. Touchstone is one of Shakespeare's greatest "fools." Yet he is very realistic in his philosophy, and he serves as a norm by which we can view the other characters.

JAQUES

He is a man of the world, a free spirit. In his travels, he has affected Continental mannerisms of speech and dress, and he believes that his ideas are terribly profound when actually they are very shallow and much generalized. Jaques is satirized by almost everyone with whom he holds "deep discussions."

DUKE SENIOR

His ducal rights are usurped, and he is banished to the Forest of Arden by his younger brother, Frederick. Ultimately, his lands and his possessions are returned to him.

ADAM

He is the de Boys' old family retainer. He is dismissed by the nasty Oliver, and later he relates to Orlando that Oliver plans to kill Orlando while he sleeps. He accompanies Orlando to the Forest of Arden.

CORIN

In contrast to Silvius, Corin is a real shepherd; he is quite knowledgeable about sheep and their care. His lines serve as a contrast to the courtly wit of Touchstone. He also serves as a contrast to the pastoral lovers, Silvius and Phebe.

AUDREY

This simple country woman, along with William and Corin, serves as a contrast to the "town" characters. She has trouble expressing her thoughts and cannot fathom the wit of Touchstone, but their love is so rapturous that eventually they are wed.

SILVIUS

This shepherd represents the romantic lover in the pastoral genre of Elizabethan literature. He loves the shepherdess Phebe, but she constantly rejects him; despite this fact, however, he pines for her throughout the play and constantly threatens suicide if his love remains unrequited. Unlike Corin, he knows absolutely nothing about sheep.

PHEBE

As the pastoral girl who is the beloved of Silvius, she is a stock figure of this type of romance — that is, she rejects the advances of Silvius, while he suffers from the woes of love-sickness. Surprisingly, she falls wildly in love with Ganymede (Rosalind in disguise), yet finally she weds Silvius.

WILLIAM

He is a stock country character who serves as a contrast to the pastoral lovers, Silvius and Phebe, and also as a contrast to the "town characters."

AMIENS

A lord attending Duke Senior; he has a light, delightful role, and in this role, he sings some of the most beautiful lyrics that Shakespeare ever wrote.

LE BEAU

He represents the man-about-town. He speaks well but knows little, and his speech, his dress, and his mannerisms are all satirized in the play.

CHARLES

A professional wrestler whom Oliver tells to kill or at least, maim Orlando. Ironically, Orlando wins the match.

SIR OLIVER MARTEXT

This vicar is not too knowledgeable; he almost joins Touchstone and Audrey in wedlock, but Touchstone is dissuaded at the last moment by Jaques.

HYMEN

The god of marriage appears in the final scene of the play to lead the masque and to give dignity to the subsequent marriage ceremony.

DENNIS

Servant to Oliver de Boys

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

ORLANDO

Basically, Orlando de Boys is "everything that doth become a man" that is, he epitomizes the Elizabethan concept of the ideal manly virtues, and he is also the embodiment of his late father's moral precepts. When the play begins, we hear him speaking about his late father's final wishes, and

we realize the extent that Orlando's brother, Oliver de Boys, has violated those wishes. Thus the plot is begun and before the scene ends, the brothers almost come to physical blows when Oliver suggests that their father sired a "villain" in the person of Orlando.

Later in the play, Orlando is faced with the dilemma of whether or not he should let his evil brother be killed by a lioness or whether he (Orlando) should act according to the high moral standards of his father's precepts and save his brother's life. He reveals his disgust with evil when he begins to turn away from his brother's peril, but he evinces his moral worth finally when he decides to kill the lioness. Thus he becomes even more heroic than he has seemed heretofore; he becomes a model of moral goodness.

"This excellent young man" is, by birth, a gentleman, the son of an illustrious knight, and, as noted, he is fiercely loyal to his father's memory. The plot turns on the fact that Orlando has received only the most rudimentary upbringing; despite this unfortunate turn of events, however, his honourable nature is unimpaired, and the nobility of character that he inherited from his father, like the handsome physical features that he also inherited from his father, emerge as standards by which the rest of the men in this comedy can be judged by. Even Oliver, Orlando's hostile brother, acknowledges Orlando's fine character and popularity:" he's gentle; never school'd and yet learned" (I.i.172-77). Orlando's courtesy, which gains him admiration and affection everywhere, is especially demonstrated when he is introduced to aristocratic society in Act I, Scene 2. In addition, his gentleness is exemplified in his solicitude for his old and ailing servant, Adam, in the Forest of Arden in Act II, Scene 6, and also in his decision to ultimately forgive his brother for his previous tyranny. In triumphing over the very human temptation to abandon his spiteful, hateful brother, Orlando reveals striking proof of his unselfish, good nature.

To these virtues may be added Orlando's sturdy independence, which prompts him to rebel against his servitude (I.i.). In addition to his admirable independence, his remarkable courage is shown when he volunteers, against powerful odds, to enter the ring with the brutish Charles, Duke Frederick's professional wrestler; he refuses to be dissuaded from fighting Charles, and, as a result, his physical strength is displayed for us in his quick defeat of the enormously powerful wrestler who has just defeated three challengers; later, of course, the narration of Orlando's successful combat with the lioness in Act IV, Scene 3 is further proof of his physical heroism.

Although Orlando is a man of action, one should note that he can appreciate Rosalind's wit; he has a superbly facile mind, and he can more than hold his own in his encounters with Jaques, a man of wise loquacity, or so he thinks (III.ii.268-312). Even Jaques admires Orlando's mind: "You have a nimble wit," Jaques admiringly notes.

All in all, Orlando embodies his age's Anglo-Saxon virtues of courtesy, gentleness, independence, courage, strength, and filial devotion; and having established Orlando as a knight-of-sorts, Shakespeare then reveals his human frailties — in particular, when Rosalind gives Orlando a necklace, his strength, courage, and all his manly virtues desert him, momentarily, and he is speechless (I.ii.260-62). In this encounter with Rosalind, he is "overthrown" by love, even though he was not overthrown earlier by Charles, the gigantic wrestler. After Orlando's decision to escape to safety in the Forest of Arden, we see him primarily in the role of a man

who is, in Shakespeare's words, "love-shak'd." He pins verses on trees in the forest and carves Rosalind's name into the bark of trees. Continually dreaming of Rosalind, he lies underneath the trees, "stretched along [in Celia's words], like a wounded knight" (III.ii.253-54). Although Orlando has seen Rosalind only once and has no certainty that he will see her again, he never wavers in his "true faith" for her, and, initially, he has no wish to be cured of his "love-sickness" (III.ii.446). Thus is Orlando, the strutting, fiery, strong, and sensual male, brought to bay not by a ferocious foe but by the whim of Eros. He is manacled not by a ball and chain but by a simple chain, the necklace from a beautiful woman's neck. And all this is achieved within the framework of one of Shakespeare's most popular and merry comedies.

In Shakespeare's day, the ideal man was a lover, as well as a physical hero; he excelled in sports and in battle, and he also celebrated his beloved in verse. And important to this definition of the ideal man is the fact that the ideal Renaissance man need not be a good poet (proof of this is in Orlando's poetry). This, of course, makes him, and the comedy, all the more delightful and human; Orlando is one of Shakespeare's most "human" creations — that is, he has his moments of weakness, but in many ways, he lives up to all the sterling ideals which have been for centuries the strengths of English character and culture.

ROSALIND

Just as Orlando, the hero of the play, exemplifies the best of the Anglo-Saxon and Elizabethan virtues of a man, Rosalind, the heroine of this comedy, exemplifies the best of virtues to be found in a Renaissance English woman. She is intelligent, witty, warm, strong of character, and she possesses an unshakable integrity. Yet, there is nothing overbearing or pedantic about her intelligence; she intimidates no one. As a result, she remains always gently and wittily human, whereas Orlando, at times, seems almost too intense in his quest to measure up to his father's precepts. Rosalind always seems to rise above the failings of fate by using her resourceful, realistic understanding, and she emerges as a human being who is to be admired. "The people praise her for her virtues," Le Beau informs us (I.ii.291); her goodness and especially her ability to calmly endure misfortune are confirmed by Duke Frederick (I.iii.79-84).

But Rosalind's patience is not without limits. She is no saint, and she can assert herself with an authority appropriate to her status as the daughter of a duke. Falsely charged with treason and condemned to exile, she is nevertheless secure in her integrity, and she is able to defend herself with courteous yet firm eloquence (I.iii.47-67).

Rosalind's exceptional mental gifts are most strikingly demonstrated during the bright flow of her conversation. She can seemingly be witty on all occasions, and her repartee is especially sparkling when she is alone with Celia, when she's drawing out the philosophical Touchstone, or when she is caricaturing Jaques, and it must also be admitted that she is particularly charming when she is lovingly teasing Orlando.

Rosalind is a discerning judge of character. Jaques, for all of his "Continental" pretensions, does not impress her at all; in contrast, she appreciates the wisdom, as well as the occasional witty foolishness, of Touchstone — a wisdom that the clown is not always fully aware of. That

is, being a fool, Touchstone cannot be aware, she thinks, of how profoundly true his statements are. "Thou speak'st wiser than thou art ware of," she says, in response to Touchstone's speech about his courting with a "peascod" (II.iv.57-58). With a many-sided intelligence that is verbal, practical, and imaginative, Rosalind outshines everyone else, male and female, in the play. Her bright humor and ready wit are so much in evidence that her deeper feelings are too often overlooked. At first, she is depressed about her father's being exiled, but then in a revealing passage, she promises to make a conscious effort to forget her sorrows and appear happy: "From henceforth I will [be merry], coz, and devise sports" (I.ii.26-27). This statement is proof that her surface gaiety is not always to be taken at face value.

Rosalind falls in love with Orlando at first sight. Impulsively, she declares her feelings by giving him her necklace and confessing:

Sir, you have wrestled well, and overthrown
More than your enemies. (I.ii.266-67)

And later, she is rashly impatient for Celia to identify the forester who has been decking the trees with verses in praise of Rosalind; when she is told that it is Orlando, she questions her cousin breathlessly (III.ii.189-244) and becomes concerned about her appearance — forgetting momentarily that she is in disguise as a man and shouldn't worry about such things. This sudden weakness is humorous; yet it is very human and girlish, and it receives understanding sympathy from the audience.

Although Rosalind laughs at love in her later bantering with Orlando ("Love is merely madness"), she assures him (II I.ii.420) that her cynicism is not to be taken literally. Later, for example, she is anxious and depressed when Orlando is late for their meeting in Act III, Scene 4, to cure his love-sickness. "Never talk to me!" she pleads with Celia, "I will weep." Rosalind's commitment to Orlando is total. "O coz, coz, coz, my pretty little coz," she exclaims to Celia, "that thou didst know how many fathom deep I am in love. My affection hath an unknown bottom (IV.i.209-13).

On the other hand, Rosalind's relationship with her father presents a possible stumbling block to the modern reader's appreciation of her warmly emotional nature. She chooses, for example, to remain with Celia rather than join Duke Senior in exile (I.i.110-18); this decision, however, could have been based on a decision to obey her father, who could hardly expect his daughter to withstand the " churlish chiding of the winter's wind" in the Forest of Arden. Significantly, it is Celia, rather than Rosalind, who proposes that they go into the Forest of Arden to seek the Duke (I.iii.109), and Rosalind's agreement is partly explained by the fact that she has just given her heart to Orlando; he occupies her every thought. Such a state of affairs is entirely natural in a romantic play, and Rosalind's final reunion with her father, Duke Senior, is as affectionate as could be wished (V.iv.122-24).

Favoured with youth, beauty, intelligence, wit, and depth of feeling, Rosalind is one of Shakespeare's most appealing creations. She has, indeed, been frequently regarded as the ideal romantic heroine — very warm and very human, and in any good production, she dominates the stage.

CELIA

Celia is in some ways the mirror that Shakespeare holds up to the audience to show the depths of Rosalind's passions. For that reason, the fact that Celia in many ways resembles Rosalind is not surprising. The two girls have almost identical backgrounds. They are princesses, cousins, and inseparable companions, brought up together from their earliest childhoods. Like Rosalind, Celia is physically attractive, intelligent, and witty; also, like Rosalind, she has a bright sense of honour. Both girls embody the essences of the ideal heroine. Celia also shares with Rosalind a reflective turn of mind, which is seen in their discussion of Fortune and Nature (I.ii.34-59).

Celia is not, however, a carbon copy of Rosalind. Rather, she serves as a foil, a mirror, a young woman who brings out, by contrast, the distinctive qualities of the play's heroine. That she shares the same virtues with Rosalind raises her attractiveness, of course, in the mind of the audience.

Although Celia is quite able to hold her own in witty conversations with Rosalind and Touchstone, she is usually reserved in public situations; in the important scenes in which both girls are present, the scenes are dominated by Rosalind. In Act III, Scene 2, for example, Celia says nothing for almost two hundred lines, which is to be explained, in part, by the fact that Rosalind is Shakespeare's principal creation, and by the fact that throughout most of the play, Celia *is not* in love. In terms of stage decorum, it is necessary that Celia, or someone else, be on stage during the courtship scenes to lend certain respectability and to keep the scenes from degenerating into burlesque. Thus, Celia acts more or less as a "chaperone" in the play. When at last she finally falls in love herself, Celia is won over immediately by Oliver; she never takes part, however, in *her* courtship as does Rosalind in her own spirited, frustrated, and protracted courtship. Humorously, Orlando is incredulous at Celia's capitulation to his brother's avowals of love. "Is't possible," he asks Oliver, "that on so little acquaintance you should like her and, wooing, she should grant?" (V.ii.1-5).

Celia provides yet another function that is often overlooked by many modern-day audiences. She serves to remind the audience that Rosalind is an actor — that is, she is a *boy* who is playing the role of a girl who, in disguise, is playing the role of a young man. There is much humor in Rosalind's masquerade as "Ganymede." The epilogue, in particular, which is part of the burlesque of the play, loses much of its humor unless the audience remembers that the actor playing Rosalind was a boy in the Elizabethan productions.

Celia's role, then, is ultimately subordinate to that of her friend, Rosalind; she has the dramatically somewhat thankless part of serving as a companion rather than as emerging as a strong personality in her own right. Yet without Celia's acting as a kind of mirror to Rosalind, Rosalind's character would lose a great deal of its brilliance. Celia's friendship for Rosalind is perhaps the most striking feature of her personality. We first see her comforting Rosalind (I.ii.1-32), and later, when the tyrannical Duke Frederick vilifies Rosalind, Celia springs to her cousin's defence, absolutely unaffected by her father's unjust remarks, which are calculated to arouse her envy and resentment (I.iii.68-88). It is Celia who proposes

that the two young women flee the palace and run off together. Importantly, Celia does not once hesitate to leave the comforts of the court in order to face the dangers of exile in order to be with her friend. Denied great romantic scenes in the play, Celia nevertheless shines passionately as the devoted friend of Rosalind, loyal, precise, and ever practical.

Touchstone

In the stage directions of the First Folio, Touchstone is designated as being a "clown"; later, he is referred to as a "fool." Basically, the term "clown" was more applicable to a country bumpkin, whereas the term "fool" was applied to the professional jester that is, the fool, the king's jester, dressed in motley. In reading Elizabethan plays, it is important to keep this important distinction in mind.

In Act I, Scene 2, Celia and Rosalind refer to Touchstone as a "natural." Here, Touchstone's character changes yet a bit more; Rosalind is saying that he is a born fool or idiot, but this is wholly out of keeping with what we know of Rosalind's character. Obviously, this is most likely a pun on the words "natural" and "nature," words that occur frequently in the scene. The comic banter of the two girls here is used as a contrast to the somber opening scene, and it is also used to establish the comic device of the pun, a word play that Elizabethan audiences never tired of. The extended pun on "natural" and "nature" in this scene where Touchstone's "wisdom" is questioned culminates in Celia's remark, "the dullness of the fool is the whetstone of the wits" (I.ii.58-59).

Touchstone, more appropriately, is described by Jaques as being "a motley fool" (II.vii.13). Here, Jaques is describing the professional jester, easily recognized by his costume, which was usually a child's long coat, gathered at the waist and falling in folds below the knees. A bauble was sometimes worn on the sleeve, and a cockscomb or feather decorated the hat.

Whatever the case in this particular scene, Touchstone's motley is sober enough to entitle him to treatment as a gentleman in the Forest of Arden. As a matter of fact, Touchstone fancies himself a courtier, and Jaques reports on Touchstone's pretensions of being a courtier in Act II, Scene 7, lines 36-38, and again when he introduces the fool to Duke Senior:

Jaq. He hath been a courtier, he swears.
Touch. If any man doubts that, let him put me to my
purgation. I have trod a measure; I have flatt'red a
lady . . . I have undone three tailors; I have had four
quarrels, and like to have fought one. (V.iv.42-49)

Touchstone has also assumed the role of a courtier in his meeting with Corins. Personally, he feels far superior to the pastoral shepherd; his criticism of pastoral life proceeds from his assumption of the superiority of sophisticated court life over country living. Later, Touchstone burlesques the artificiality of the gentlemanly code of honour (V.iv.48-108), which is in keeping, of course, with his multifaceted personality.

Another interesting aspect of Touchstone's character is the fact that he is restricted in his singing. Shakespeare usually gives some songs to his fools. Yet here, Touchstone sings only snatches of song. Several explanations have been advanced as to why Touchstone is not given more songs to sing, but all arguments remain only conjectures.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that in a fantasy such as *As You Like It,* it is not necessary that every character be fully developed. The

strength of this play lies in its dialogue and in its masque-like elements. That Touchstone is not truly and fully developed as a character does not detract from the play. That he is a superb example of theatrical convention is enough, and in no way does it detract from his effectiveness as an integral part of the play. His wit is the wit of a master dramatist, even if he remains, ultimately, incomplete, an enigma of contradictions.

CRITICAL ESSAY

THE NATURAL AND THE ARTIFICIAL IN *AS YOU LIKE IT*

Shakespeare's themes are often expressed in terms of oppositions, such as the conflicting values associated with fair and foul in *Macbeth. As You Like It* is no exception. Running throughout *As You Like It* is a tension of antithesis between the natural (that which is free, spontaneous, and wholesome) and the artificial (that which is constrained, calculated, and unnatural). The clash between these two ways of life is seen on several levels: (1) social: in the values associated with civilized society (the court or a great country estate) compared with the value of simple living (the open pastures and the forest encampment); (2) familial: in the strife that sets brother against brother and parent against child; and (3) personal: in the contrast between courtships that are based upon genuine emotion (Orlando and Rosalind) and those that are based on formal conventions (Silvius and Phebe). These various levels are not kept distinct in the play, however, and disorder in one area is likely to parallel disorder in another.

The first scene of the play introduces us to organized life on a country estate. Here the close ties that should unite brothers have been perverted. The unnaturalness of the situation is made clear in Orlando's opening speech. He has been kept from his modest patrimony, his gentle birth has been undermined, and he speaks of "mutiny" and "servitude." Oliver's brutal treatment of the faithful servant Adam, whom he addresses as an "old dog," shows that the disorder affects other members of the household as well. In the same scene we learn of an earlier, parallel perversion of normal family life, but here the roles are reversed, with the young men's father, a *younger* brother abusing his *older* brother. The wrestler, Charles, reports that "the old Duke is banished by his younger brother, the new Duke." On the social level, the corruption of the great estate is matched by the debasement of court life.

But in opposition to these sinister currents, we witness a strong element of harmony between relations: Celia loves her cousin Rosalind so much that she will follow her into exile or else stay behind with her and die. And we learn too of a harmonious social order established by the banished Duke Senior and his "merry men" in the Forest of Arden. Thus the opposition between court and country, the natural and the artificial, is established at the outset of the play.

In Act I, Scene 2, the corruptions of court life are overtly shown; there is little subtlety here. For example, the clown speaks jestingly of a knight without honour who has nevertheless prospered under Frederick, the reigning duke. Not long afterwards, Orlando, who has just won the wrestling match, is denied the honour due him for his triumph because his father, whom "the world esteemed . honourable," was the usurper's enemy.

The natural values subverted in the earlier scenes find glowing representation in Act II, Scene 1 — that is, "painted pomp," "the envious court," and "public haunt" give way to the uncomplicated rewards of a life close to trees and running brooks. Here, the banished Duke Senior and his "co-mates and brothers in exile" find their existence "sweet." But to achieve full contentment they have had to adjust themselves to the natural hardships of their lot — "the icy fang / And churlish chiding of the winter's wind."

The pattern of accommodation is one that the various fugitives in the Forest of Arden go through; to them, the forest at first appears wild rather than green, and threatening rather than hospitable. Rosalind complains that her spirits are weary; Celia is too exhausted to continue; Touchstone frankly declares, "When I was at home, I was in a better place." Orlando and Adam almost starve, and Orlando speaks of the "uncouth [rough] forest," "the bleak air," and "this desert." Oliver becomes a "wretched ragged man" threatened by savage beasts.

But all of these characters eventually make their peace with the forest, and even the tyrant, Duke Frederick, is converted when he comes "to the skirts of this wild." For Orlando, the reconciliation is effected when he, along with Adam, joins Duke Senior's feast. The grand movement of the play, then, is from organized society to the country, from constraint to freedom, and from hardship to joy. "Now go we in content," Celia says on the eve of her exile, "to liberty, and not to banishment."

Shakespeare's Forest of Arden furnishes the setting against which most of the action unfolds, but it serves as much more than a mere backdrop. The greenwood assumes symbolic stature. First of all, it is an "idyllic forest." The words used by Charles to describe Duke Senior's life in the forest suggest an idyllic existence, and in the famous pastoral romances of Shakespeare's day, a world is created in which shepherds and shepherdesses sing, pipe tunes, and make love while their flocks graze carelessly in green valley's bright with the sunshine of eternal summer.

This golden world, needless to say, has little relation to the actualities of country living in any age, yet it is the artist's fulfilment of the universal longing to flee burdensome realities and find quietude and peace. In Shakespeare's time, no less than in ours, people felt the need for just such an escape. This idyllic concept of Arden is introduced, as was noted, by the rumour reported by Charles in the first scene, and to this Forest of Arden (a name that has since become synonymous with a forest utopia) belong such creatures as Silvius and Phebe, whose names and behavior link them to later Acadian literature. These characters are absorbed entirely in the sighing disquietudes of love, as only the shepherds and shepherdesses of romance can afford to do.

The greenwood of Arden is also, of course, symbolic of an "actual forest." Shakespeare's Forest of Arden is subject to the changes wrought by the seasons, and even the stoic Duke Senior admits finally that he and his company have suffered "shrewd days and nights."

Furthermore, the presence of Touchstone and Jaques in the forest provides what one critic has called "counterstatements" to the theme of rural contentment. To Jaques, the exchange of civilized comfort for country hardships is symptomatic of human stubbornness, as his contemptuous parody of "under the greenwood tree" makes evident (II.v.52-59). Touchstone, on the other hand, is an example of Shakespeare's sense of irony about pastoral joys, for he plays the role of a discontented

exile from the court. Under the guise of apparent nonsense in his reply to Corin's query about how he likes the shepherd's life (III.ii.12-22), Touchstone mocks the contradictory nature of the desires ideally resolved by pastoral life — that is, to be at the same time at court and in the fields and to enjoy both the advantages of rank, in addition to the advantages of the classless estate of Arden. This sort of humor goes to the heart of the pastoral convention and shows how very clearly Shakespeare understood it and could use it to its best, humorous advantage.

The realities of country living are squarely faced in the characters of Audrey, who is no beauteous damsel; William, who is no poetical swain; and Corin, who is a simple "true labourer" in the pastures. If Silvius and Phebe find their places in Shakespeare's complex Arden, their romancing is presented as frankly *artificial,* in contrast with both the elemental, biological basis of Touchstone's pursuit of Audrey and the profoundly felt love experienced by Rosalind and Orlando. Thus, Silvius and Phebe, pastoral stereotypes, provide another instance of the opposition between the natural and the unnatural, which is always a dominant thematic concern of the play.

STUDY HELP ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. List the "town" characters in the play, enumerate their attributes, and discuss how they reflect town life. Use the same format for the "country" characters.
2. There are four pairs of lovers in the play. Characterize each couple and discuss the concept of love that they represent.
3. Give several examples showing how Shakespeare uses language to indicate class differences among the characters.
4. There are many words in the play that have changed in their meanings since Shakespeare's time. Make a list of those significant words that are germane to a thorough understanding the play. Discuss how only a present-day meaning of the words can bring about a misunderstanding of the play.
5. What purpose does Rosalind's disguise serve in the play?
6. Discuss the advantages of "town life" over that of "country life." Reverse the situation. How does Shakespeare resolve this debate?
7. Of different types of love shown in the play, which does Shakespeare seem to favor? In which characters does this evince itself and to what extent?
8. Discuss the various types of humor in the play. Compare or contrast the wit of Touchstone with that of Jaques; with Corin; and with Rosalind.
9. Why is it necessary for the main characters to meet climactically in the Forest of Arden?
10. The Forest of Arden has been said to be, in actuality, the Forest of the Ardennes on the Meuse River in Europe. Yet, there is a Forest of Arden in England. Where do you think it is located? Why?
11. List the masque-like elements in the play.
12. What stage conventions were popular with Elizabethan audiences? Give specific references from the play to support your answers.
13. What use does Shakespeare make of shifting his scenes — that is, from a courtly scene to a pastoral scene, etc.?

14. Where is the dramatic climax in the play? Where is the literary climax in the play?
15. How do the characters reflect the time in which Shakespeare wrote?

UNIT III
RICHARD II – TRAGEDY

STRUCTURE

Introduction
Play Summary
Character List
Character Analysis
Critical Essay Sixteenth-Century Political Theory
Study Help Essay Questions
Further Readings

INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare, the most influential writer in all of English literature and certainly the most important playwright of the English Renaissance, William Shakespeare was born in 1564 in the town of Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire, England. The son of a successful middle-class glove-maker, Shakespeare attended grammar school, but his formal education proceeded no further. In 1582, he married an older woman, Anne Hathaway, and had three children with her. Around 1590 he left his family behind and travelled to London to work as an actor and playwright. Public and critical success quickly followed, and Shakespeare eventually became the most popular playwright in England and part owner of the Globe Theatre. His career bridged the reigns of Elizabeth I (ruled 1558-1603) and James I (ruled 1603-1625); he was a favourite of both monarchs. Indeed, James granted Shakespeare's company the greatest possible compliment by endowing them with the status of king's players. Wealthy and renowned, Shakespeare retired to Stratford, and died in 1616 at the age of fifty-two. At the time of Shakespeare's death, such luminaries as Ben Jonson hailed him as the apogee of Renaissance theatre.

Shakespeare's works were collected and printed in various editions in the century following his death, and by the early eighteenth century his reputation as the greatest poet ever to write in English was well established. The unprecedented admiration garnered by his works led to a fierce curiosity about Shakespeare's life; but the paucity of surviving biographical information has left many details of Shakespeare's personal history shrouded in mystery. Some people have concluded from this fact that Shakespeare's plays in reality were written by someone else--Francis Bacon and the Earl of Oxford are the two most popular candidates--but the evidence for this claim is overwhelmingly circumstantial, and the theory is not taken seriously by many scholars.

In the absence of definitive proof to the contrary, Shakespeare must be viewed as the author of the 37 plays and 154 sonnets that bear his name. The legacy of this body of work is immense. A number of Shakespeare's plays seem to have transcended even the category of brilliance, becoming so influential as to affect profoundly the course of Western literature and culture ever after.

Richard II is one of Shakespeare's so-called "history" plays: It is the first part of a tetralogy, or four-part series, which deals with the historical rise of the English royal House of Lancaster. (The plays that round out the series are *Henry IV*, Parts 1 & 2, and Henry V.) The play was probably composed around 1595, and certainly no later than 1597. It was used by the Earl of Essex to try make a point shortly before his unsuccessful rebellion in 1601; Queen Elizabeth, no dummy, commented "I am *Richard II*, know ye not that?" In this case, however, the historical precedent did not hold--Elizabeth, unlike Richard, retained her crown. The play has fascinated critics down through the centuries, although it has long been considered inferior to Shakespeare's other history plays. King Richard's deeply poetic and "metaphysical" musings on the nature of kingship and identity mark a new direction for Shakespeare; indeed, much of *Richard II* reads like a run-up to the more fully developed intellectualizing of *Hamlet*. The play's formal qualities are also interesting: it is often highly stylized and, in sharp contrast to the "Henry" plays that follow it, contains virtually no prose. Shakespeare makes good use of grand metaphors--such as the famous comparisons of England to a garden, and of its reigning king to a lion or to the sun--and opens up rich, complex themes such as the nature of kingship and of identity.

PLAY SUMMARY

The play opens with a dispute between Henry Bolingbroke, Duke of Hereford, and Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk. Bolingbroke has accused Mowbray of treason, and the two of them exchange insults in the presence of King Richard. After attempts to reconcile them fail, Richard orders them to take part in a traditional chivalric trial by combat. On the field of combat, the king changes his mind and banishes the two men — Bolingbroke for ten years (commuted to six) and Mowbray for life. Then the king makes plans to leave for the wars in Ireland.

Before departing, Richard visits the ailing father of Bolingbroke, John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster. Gaunt warns Richard with his dying words that he is flirting with danger and doing great harm to the country by allowing himself to be influenced by his sycophantic courtiers. When he dies, Richard takes possession of all of Gaunt's wealth and leaves for Ireland.

Unhappy with Richard's incompetence as a ruler and worried by his seizure of the Duke of Lancaster's wealth, a number of nobles rally support for Henry Bolingbroke. When Bolingbroke and his army decide to return from exile in France, the rebel forces prepare to confront Richard on his return from Ireland.

The rebel noblemen force the king to abdicate, and Bolingbroke is crowned as *Henry IV*. Richard is imprisoned in Pomfret Castle, where he faces his death alone, philosophically contemplating the meaning of his fall from grandeur. Sir Pierce of Exton decides solely on his own to execute the deposed king, and then, as a result, he is banished by King Henry. The play ends with *Henry IV* planning a penitential pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

CHARACTER LIST

KING RICHARD

Historically, he is said to be the handsomest man of his time; in the play, he has great charm and a love for beautiful things. His court is characterized outwardly by its luxury and refinement, but Richard's own particular favourites are greedy men who are interested primarily in the profits made from usurping land, excessive taxation, and fraud. Richard allows himself to be used by these men and, as a result, is deposed by one of his noblemen, whom he sent unfairly into exile.

BOLINGBROKE

Henry, Duke of Hereford and Lancaster; he takes revenge on Richard after the king unfairly banishes him from England and, moreover, claims all of Henry's family lands and wealth after Henry's father, John of Gaunt, dies. Bolingbroke is a "model" Englishman and, for that reason, is not entirely convinced that he has the right to usurp the crown from a man who *seems* corrupt even though he is supposed to be God's deputy on earth.

YORK

He is Richard's most powerful supporter; when Richard leaves with his forces to fight in Ireland, he leaves York in charge of England. York is honest and good throughout the play, and because of these qualities, he finally cannot condone Richard's unprincipled actions; thus he changes his allegiance to Bolingbroke and his supporters.

AUMERLE

York's headstrong son remains loyal to Richard throughout the play despite the fact that this loyalty threatens his relationship with his father. He even becomes involved in a plot to assassinate Bolingbroke, but at the pleading of his mother, he confesses his deed and is pardoned by Bolingbroke.

QUEEN ISABELLA

She appears four times in the play and, each time, are characterized by her gentleness and her devotion to Richard. Moreover, there is a feeling of helplessness about her. Her grief becomes despair when she realizes that her husband has been deposed. She tries, however, to goad him into at least a *show* of valor and resistance when she speaks with him on his way to prison.

MOWBRAY

Clearly, he had a hand in the murder of Gloucester even though he denies it. Richard exiles him for life, probably in order to remove this hand-chosen assassin from the country. Mowbray dies abroad during one of the Crusades.

NORTHUMBERLAND

A powerful and aggressive character; his allegiance is early aligned with Bolingbroke. He fights alongside Bolingbroke and arranges for Richard's surrender. It is he who breaks up the last of Richard's conspirators.

PERCY

Northumberland's son. He is an eager soldier, chivalrous, and an active supporter of Bolingbroke.

DUCHESS OF GLOUCESTER

It was the murder of her husband that caused Bolingbroke to accuse Mowbray of assassination and treason. She begs old Gaunt to take revenge on Richard; her anger is fiery and passionate. She dies of grief for her husband.

DUCHESS OF YORK

Her loyalty is, foremost, to her son, who is loyal to Richard. Her whole character revolves around Aumerle's safety. She herself is fearless before Bolingbroke, but she fears the latter's power to silence her son's seemingly treasonous words and deeds.

SURREY

He is sympathetic with Aumerle and refutes Fitzwater's claim that Aumerle, in Fitzwater's presence, did take credit for Gloucester's death.

CARLISLE

He is ever-loyal to Richard because he sees Richard's role as one that was heaven-ordained. He rails against Bolingbroke but, importantly, also chides Richard for the kind of king he has been. In the end, Bolingbroke pardons him because of his unusually high character.

ABBOT OF WESTMINSTER

He hears Aumerle's wish to revenge himself on Bolingbroke and, therefore, invites Aumerle home so that the two of them can make further plans.

ROSS AND WILLOUGHBY

Representatives of the followers of Bolingbroke.

FITZWATER

He swears that he heard Aumerle take full credit for Gloucester's murder. Surrey takes issue with this statement, and Fitzwater challenges him to a duel.

EXTON

Believing that Bolingbroke wishes him to kill Richard, he does so; immediately afterward, however, he is sure that he acted rashly. Bolingbroke banishes him.

SALISBURY

Richard leaves him in charge of the military forces while he fights in Ireland. He is upset when he discovers that he has no Welsh support for Richard when he knows that Bolingbroke and his supporters are ready to attack Richard.

SCROOP

He announces to Richard that the common people have championed Bolingbroke as their favorite. He appears only in Act III, Scenes 2 and 3.

BERKELEY

In charge of the troops guarding Bristol Castle, he is rebuked when Bolingbroke confronts him, and he refers to Bolingbroke as Hereford — and not as Lancaster.

BUSHY AND GREEN

They are followers of Richard, but they are neither heroic nor staunch in their loyalty. They plot, connive, and flee at the approach of danger. Bolingbroke corners them finally and has them killed. They are representative of the low-class flatterers whom Richard surrounds himself with.

BAGOT

He has a part only slightly larger than Bushy and Green; otherwise, he is not distinguishable from them.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

RICHARD II

As a King, Richard is supposedly divine and all powerful; as a man, he is an ordinary mortal and prey to his own weaknesses. The private tragedy of the play, for Richard, is in his being forced to face this duality. Shakespeare demonstrates that Richard is perhaps temperamentally not fit

for the role which history would have him play. His decisions as a monarch seem irrational and arbitrary; he won't listen to the sane advice of old Gaunt, and he insensitively seizes wealth belonging to his noblemen.

It is only during his deposition and his imprisonment that Richard shows his greatest strength as a dramatic figure. Although occasionally he seems to demonstrate self-pity (Bolingbroke accuses him of this), he also reveals himself to have an acute awareness of the ironies and absurdities in the structure of power in his kingdom. Although he keeps reminding those present of his God-given mandate to rule, he seems also to take pleasure in passing on the trials of kingship to his successor.

Richard's last speeches are among the most beautiful in the play. It is as though Shakespeare were allowing the man himself, stripped of political power, a chance to achieve a human power which surpasses suffering and becomes self-knowledge.

HENRY BOLINGBROKE

Bolingbroke contrasts with Richard in many ways. He seems practical minded, honest, and sensitive — in many ways, the "natural" king. It is also important to realize that in the early stages of the play, Bolingbroke is, at best, a reluctant rebel. The insult to himself and his father and the urging which he receives from his peers are the determining factors in his effort to depose Richard. He is keenly aware of the magnitude of the crime which he is embarking on, and he quickly learns the tediousness of being a ruler, as is particularly evident in the scene which precedes Richard's prison cell monologue. Whereas Richard's tragic situation catapults his speech into a kind of poetry, Henry's newly placed crown lowers him down into the centre of a domestic squabble. His last decision, to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, underscores his uneasiness with his new role as king.

JOHN OF GAUNT

Bolingbroke's father serves as a kind of spiritual touchstone for the play. Near death, he is impatient with the prevarications of the king and his courtiers; he accuses them of undermining the solid state of England. His rousing patriotic speeches put the political theme of the play directly before the audience. When Richard insults old Gaunt, it is tantamount to sacrilege and treason. When Richard, in effect, steals Gaunt's wealth after his death, it gives Henry Bolingbroke more than enough personal reason for rebelling against the king.

THE DUKE OF YORK AND AUMERLE

York and Gaunt should be thought of together. Both seem to represent solid qualities in the English character. It is significant that York struggles with his own sense of what is orthodox and right before throwing in his lot with the rebels. Like old Gaunt, York has a son, but whereas Bolingbroke is the one to depose the king, York's son Aumerle remains loyal to Richard. The father and son are at each other's throats before the end of the play over the question of loyalty to the present ruler. Bolingbroke forgives Aumerle of his possible treachery, but the point is

made that the political struggle has repercussions — even down to the ordinary family level.

STUDY HELP ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. In what ways can Richard be considered a tragic figure?
2. Discuss the imagery of gardens and gardening in the play.
3. Contrast Richard and Henry as rulers.
4. How do the minor characters such as Mowbray, Aumerle, Bushy, Bagot, and Green function in the play?
5. What is the particular function of the women in this play?
6. Defend York's change of allegiance to Bolingbroke.

FURTHER READING

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BLOCK II
SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS-II

UNIT IV
RICHARD II – POLITICAL PLAY

CRITICAL ESSAY ON SIXTEENTH-CENTURY POLITICAL THEORY

Since Shakespeare's *Richard II* and the *Henry IV* plays are basically political ones, it is necessary to understand the political doctrine behind them if one is to do justice to Shakespeare's intentions. Elizabeth I, the fifth Tudor to rule England, had come to a throne which was in many ways insecure because of rival claims. Henry VIII, her father, had found it especially necessary to inculcate the doctrine of absolute obedience to the Crown after the break with Rome in 1536. During his reign, he had experienced the Pilgrimage of Grace, a rebellion in northern England, and, later, the Exeter Conspiracy, an alleged attempt to depose Henry and place a Yorkist on the throne of England. After Henry VIII's death, England endured the Western Rebellion of 1549; during Elizabeth's reign, there occurred the Rebellion of 1569, as well as plots against the queen's life, notably the Babington Plot, which led to the trial, conviction, and execution of Mary, Queen of Scots. Throughout the century and beyond, England had reason to fear an invasion and the uprising of native Catholics. The danger was by no means restricted to the year 1588, when Philip II of Spain sent his Armada to subdue England.

The censorship of Shakespeare's *Richard II*, including the deposition scene, along with the commissioning of the play the night before the Essex rising and the comment of Elizabeth I, "I am *Richard II*, know ye not that?" (Nichols 552), have led to decades of analysis on how the play shadows the potential deposition of Elizabeth herself. Did the play spur the Essex rebels to action against the Queen? Did the Queen see herself in the play's fallen monarch? Did her advisors recognize the parallel as well, thereby ordering the play's censorship?

Richard II to Elizabethan state politics-the play's censorship, the rebels' commissioning, and Elizabeth's comment-recent critics have challenged every one of these suppositions. Cyndia Susan Clegg carefully considers the alleged censorship of the play only to conclude that fourth quarto's expanded deposition scene may not indicate earlier press censorship but merely expansion and revision (Clegg 1997). Paul E. J. Hammer has argued that, if Shakespeare's play was indeed commissioned the night before the Essex rising, it was a mere coincidence; the rising was not a planned event, but instead an unexpected skirmish. Finally, the queen's comment has been deemed questionable, being published years after its supposed delivery (Barroll 1988: 447; Bate 2009: 23-27; Clegg 1999: 119).1 In short, there is no evidence that the performance of Shakespeare's play was used as a spur to immediate action against Elizabeth or her advisors; and there is little firm evidence the play

provoked royal or state disapprobrium in the way scholars hypothesized. *Richard II* does, however, address some of the most crucial political questions of the Elizabethan era. Succession, tyranny, divine-right monarchy, popularity, favoritism, state expenditure, and military involvement in Ireland are among the issues that both define late Elizabethan political conversation and appear in the play.

Scholars have explored such connections: they have suggested how the play might shadow Elizabethan policy, be it in Ireland or at court with favorites such as Leicester or Essex; they have also studied how the play might challenge or bolster the Elizabethan state in its representation of the deposition of an English king. Most pointedly, connecting the play to Catholic resistance theory such as the Jesuit Robert Parsons' A Conference against the Next Succession to the Crown of England (1594), scholars investigate how the tyrannical, illegitimate rule of *Richard II* might mirror the government of Elizabeth, both trespassing law and custom, and therefore prompting allegedly legitimate deposition.

This study contributes to discussions of *Richard II* in relation to Elizabethan politics from a different angle. Rather than viewing the play through the prism of Elizabeth, her advisors, and the English state, I examine the play through the lens of European political thought, and the forms of kingship which England might well experience when a new and most likely foreign monarch (such as James VI or Philip II) comes to sit on its throne. In the period after the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots in 1587 and the resulting war with Philip II of Spain; in the period of wars in the Low Countries, with English troops defending the Protestant Dutch against the Spanish; and in the period just after the conversion of the French king *Henry IV* to Catholicism in 1593, England stood in embattled relation to Catholic Europe and particularly to Spain. Yet Philip II-former king of England by his marriage to Mary I and, through his rule of Portugal, alleged descendant of John of Gaunt-had a claim to the throne asserted repeatedly by English Catholic recusants, including most vehemently Parsons whose pamphlet appeared the year before Shakespeare's play.

Repositioning Shakespeare's *Richard II* in relation to European debates on succession, tyrannicide, and sovereignty illuminates the play's timely engagement with contemporary political issues, while at the same time avoiding the critical acrobatics necessary to read the play as a political allegory of the Elizabethan court itself. By the 1590s, Elizabeth made an unlikely Richard. In contrast to Shakespeare's king, she was neither young, tyrannical, impulsive, lawless, nor easily led. This is not to say she was free from the charge of tyranny: the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots and the cutting of John Stubbes' writing hand, to give two examples, earned her notoriety. Further, her more radical Catholic subjects deemed her recusancy policies a sign of her tyranny, while Stubbes, John Goodman, and John Knox wrote against female rule as inherently unlawful and tyrannical (see Walker 1998). But by 1595/6, the year of the play, Elizabeth's imminent demise (she was 62 when the play was first performed) and the rule of her potential successor were more immediate concerns than her mode of governance over the last four decades (on the play's date see Forker 2002: 111-20).2

In view of such challenges to Tudor supremacy, there was a need for a political philosophy which would prevent challenges to royal authority and prevent devastating civil war. The basic arguments were developed during the reign of Henry VIII and augmented as new crises arose during the reigns of Edward VI and Elizabeth I. It found expression in officially approved pamphlets and tracts, and also in drama and non-dramatic poetry. Especially it was emphasized in official sermons, the first group of which was introduced in the year 1549. These included strongly worded instructions on the subject of obedience. They were augmented in 1570, following the Rebellion of 1569 and the papal decree of excommunication of Queen Elizabeth I.

Every Englishman was required to hear the sermons on obedience three times during the year. The gist of the doctrine was this: The ruler was God's lieutenant on earth; no subject, however exalted, had the right to actively oppose him. To do so was a sin against religion, punishable by suffering here and now and by eternal damnation after death. Even if the ruler were a tyrant, the subject had no right to oppose him, for the head of state ruled with God's sufferance. In support of this doctrine, appeals were made primarily to biblical authority. Texts such as Romans 13 and Proverbs 8, as well as ones in Matthew, were cited repeatedly. John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, summed up the doctrine accurately and concisely in his response to his sister-in-law, the Duchess of Gloucester, who reminded him that the reigning king, *Richard II*, had been responsible for the death of her husband and Gaunt's brother:

God's is the quarrel, for God's substitute,
His deputy anointed in His sight,
Hath caus'd his death; the which if wrongfully,
Let Heaven revenge; for I may never lift
An angry arm against His minister. (I. ii. 37-41)

That *Henry IV* should so suffer is to be explained by the fact that he, son of John of Gaunt, did "lift an angry arm against [God's] minister." He endures rebellion; he sees the apparent waywardness of Prince Hal as part of his punishment; he is not permitted to lead a crusade against the foes of Christianity and do penance for his grievous sins. But, according to Tudor political theory, he wore the crown by God's authority; no subject had the right to oppose him. All this should make understandable the Percys' position and make unacceptable the view that *Henry IV* is a hypocrite.

STUDY HELP ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. How do the political themes and private themes in the play interconnect?

2. Contrast Richard and Henry as rulers.

3. To what extent does the death of Gloucester affect Richard's deposition?

4. Richard is often said to be an "unkingly" ruler. Discuss.

UNIT V
JULIUS CAESAR

STRUCTURE

Play Summary
About *Julius Caesar*
Character Analysis
Critical Essays Major Themes
Study Help Essay Questions

PLAY SUMMARY

The action begins in February 44 BC. *Julius Caesar* has just re-entered Rome in triumph after a victory in Spain over the sons of his old enemy, Pompey the Great. A spontaneous celebration has interrupted and been broken up by Flavius and Marullus, two political enemies of Caesar. It soon becomes apparent from their words that powerful and secret forces are working against Caesar.

Caesar appears, attended by a train of friends and supporters, and is warned by a soothsayer to "beware the ides of March," but he ignores the warning and leaves for the games and races marking the celebration of the feast of Lupercal.

After Caesar's departure, only two men remain behind — Marcus Brutus, a close personal friend of Caesar, and Cassius, a long-time political foe of Caesar's. Both men are of aristocratic origin and see the end of their ancient privilege in Caesar's political reforms and conquests. Envious of Caesar's power and prestige, Cassius cleverly probes to discover where Brutus' deepest sympathies lie. As a man of highest personal integrity, Brutus opposes Caesar on principle, despite his friendship with him. Cassius cautiously inquires about Brutus' feelings if a conspiracy were to unseat Caesar; he finds Brutus not altogether against the notion; that is, Brutus shares "some aim" with Cassius but does not wish "to be any further moved." The two men promising to meet again for further discussions.

In the next scene, it is revealed that the conspiracy Cassius spoke of in veiled terms is already a reality. He has gathered together a group of disgruntled and discredited aristocrats who are only too willing to assassinate Caesar. Partly to gain the support of the respectable element of Roman society, Cassius persuades Brutus to head the conspiracy, and Brutus agrees to do so. Shortly afterward, plans are made at a secret meeting in Brutus' orchard. The date is set: It will be on the day known as the ides of March, the fifteenth day of the month. Caesar is to be murdered in the Senate chambers by the concealed daggers and swords of the assembled conspirators.

After the meeting is ended, Brutus' wife, Portia, suspecting something and fearing for her husband's safety, questions him. Touched by her love and devotion, Brutus promises to reveal his secret to her later.

The next scene takes place in Caesar's house. The time is the early morning; the date, the fateful ides of March. The preceding night has been a strange one — wild, stormy, and full of strange and unexplainable sights

and happenings throughout the city of Rome. Caesar's wife, Calphurnia, terrified by horrible nightmares, persuades Caesar not to go to the Capitol, convinced that her dreams are portents of disaster. By prearrangement, Brutus and the other conspirators arrive to accompany Caesar, hoping to fend off any possible warnings until they have him totally in their power at the Senate. Unaware that he is surrounded by assassins and shrugging off Calphurnia's exhortations, Caesar goes with them.

Despite the conspirators' best efforts, a warning is pressed into Caesar's hand on the very steps of the Capitol, but he refuses to read it. Wasting no further time, the conspirators move into action. Purposely asking Caesar for a favor they know he will refuse, they move closer, as if begging a favor, and then, reaching for their hidden weapons, they kill him before the shocked eyes of the senators and spectators.

Hearing of Caesar's murder, Mark Antony, Caesar's closest friend, begs permission to speak at Caesar's funeral. Brutus grants this permission over the objections of Cassius and delivers his own speech first, confident that his words will convince the populace of the necessity for Caesar's death. After Brutus leaves, Antony begins to speak. The crowd has been swayed by Brutus' words, and it is an unsympathetic crowd that Antony addresses. Using every oratorical device known, however, Antony turns the audience into a howling mob, screaming for the blood of Caesar's murderers. Alarmed by the furor caused by Antony's speech, the conspirators and their supporters are forced to flee from Rome and finally, from Italy. At this point, Antony, together with Caesar's young grandnephew and adopted son, Octavius, and a wealthy banker, Lepidus, gathers an army to pursue and destroy Caesar's killers. These three men, known as *triumvirs*, have formed a group called the *Second Triumvirate* to pursue the common goal of gaining control of the Roman Empire.

Months pass, during which the conspirators and their armies are pursued relentlessly into the far reaches of Asia Minor. When finally they decide to stop at the town of Sardis, Cassius and Brutus quarrel bitterly over finances. Their differences are resolved, however, and plans are made to meet the forces of Antony, Octavius, and Lepidus in one final battle. Against his own better judgment, Cassius allows Brutus to overrule him: Instead of holding to their well-prepared defensive positions, Brutus orders an attack on Antony's camp on the plains of Philippi. Just before the battle, Brutus is visited by the ghost of Caesar. "I shall see thee at Philippi," the spirit warns him, but Brutus' courage is unshaken and he goes on.

The battle rages hotly. At first, the conspirators appear to have the advantage, but in the confusion, Cassius is mistakenly convinced that all is lost, and he kills himself. Leaderless, his forces are quickly defeated, and Brutus finds himself fighting a hopeless battle. Unable to face the prospect of humiliation and shame as a captive (who would be chained to the wheels of Antony's chariot and dragged through the streets of Rome), he too takes his own life.

As the play ends, Antony delivers a eulogy over Brutus' body, calling him "the noblest Roman of them all." Caesar's murder has been avenged, order has been restored, and, most important, the Roman Empire has been preserved.

ABOUT *JULIUS CAESAR*

In 1599, when William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* was performed at the new Globe Theatre, Elizabeth I was an aged monarch with no legitimate heir neither a child of her own nor a named heir. The people of England worried about succession, fully aware of the power struggles that could take place when men vied for the throne of England. They were also aware of the realities of the violence of civil strife.

It is no surprise, then, that the subject matter of this play was relevant to their concerns, even as the content of this play drew on and adapted ancient history. In 44 BC, Rome was at the centre of a large and expanding empire. The city was governed by senators but their politics were plagued by in-fighting, and the real glory and strength belonged to generals like Caesar and Antony. In addition, a new group, the Tribunes, had entered the political field. After a hard-won battle, the plebeians, the working class of Rome, had elected these men as their representatives and protectors (as represented by Flavius and Marullus in Act I). The return of the triumphant Caesar and his desire to centralize power went against the grain of the decentralizing that was taking place. Such a setting was fraught with the makings of dramatic conflict.

Shakespeare took this potential for upheaval and used it to examine a leadership theme. Concentrating on the responsibilities of the ruling class, he looked at what could happen if that class no longer had a unified vision and had lost sight of what it meant to be Roman. In fact, the characters of the play lose touch with the tradition, glory, integrity, and stoicism of their past. As you read the play, note the way that Cassius uses the memory of that glorious past to persuade men to become conspirators, and the way that the actions of the conspirators do or do not return Rome to its golden age.

Persuasion, too, is a concept at the centre of this play. Everyone seems to be trying to convince someone else of something: Caesar tries to create an image in the public's mind of his crowning (an ancient form of spin doctoring); Cassius finds the best way to manipulate each man he seeks to bring to his side; and Brutus, whom the reader hopes will refuse to participate, takes longer than the others to respond to Cassius' manipulations, but eventually does respond and even finishes the job for him by persuading himself (see his soliloquy in Act II, Scene 1). This pivotal scene, when Brutus joins the conspirators, is also interesting because Portia, Brutus' wife, serves as the voice of Brutus' conscience. Portia is, in some ways, a stronger character than Brutus and yet, because of her position as a woman in an overwhelmingly male-dominated world, her role is minimal.

If gender is not a central issue to this play, questions of masculinity and effeminacy are. Caesar's weakness his effeminacy makes him vulnerable. On the other hand, the incorporation of the so-called feminine traits of compassion and love into the friendship between Brutus and Cassius paradoxically allows the men to show greater strength and allows the audience to have greater sympathy for them.

Finally, it is important to have a look at the end of this play and consider what kind of resolution it actually brings. In fact, this approach helps analyze any of Shakespeare's plays. Near the end of *Julius Caesar*, lessons appear to have been learned and Brutus seems to have received his

proper due, but audience must not forget that the final speakers, Antony and Octavius, have not always been truthful men and may not be in the future. The ambiguity of the ending of this play is characteristic of Shakespeare's work. The more neatly things seem to be resolved, the more likely it is that the action has just begun.

CHARACTER LIST

FLAVIUS AND **MARULLUS**

Tribunes who wish to protect the plebeians from Caesar's tyranny; they break up a crowd of commoners waiting to witness Caesar's triumph and are "put to silence" during the feast of Lupercal for removing ornaments from Caesar's statues.

JULIUS CAESAR

A successful military leader who wants the crown of Rome. Unfortunately, he is not the man he used to be and is imperious, easily flattered, and overly ambitious. He is assassinated midway through the play; later, his spirit appears to Brutus at Sardis and also at Philippi.

CASCA

Witness to Caesar's attempts to manipulate the people of Rome into offering him the crown, he reports the failure to Brutus and Cassius. He joins the conspiracy the night before the assassination and is the first conspirator to stab Caesar.

CALPHURNIA

The wife of *Julius Caesar*; she urges him to stay at home on the day of the assassination because of the unnatural events of the previous night as well her prophetic dream in which Caesar's body is a fountain of blood.

MARCUS ANTONIUS (MARK ANTONY)

He appears first as a confidant and a devoted follower of Caesar, and he offers Caesar a crown during the feast of Lupercal. He has a reputation for sensuous living, but he is also militarily accomplished, politically shrewd, and skilled at oration. He is able to dupe Brutus into allowing him to speak at Caesar's funeral and by his funeral oration to excite the crowd to rebellion. He is one of the triumvirs, and he and Octavius defeat Brutus and Cassius at Philippi.

A SOOTHSAYER

He warns Caesar during the celebration of the feast of Lupercal to "beware the ides of March." He again warns Caesar as he enters the Senate House.

MARCUS BRUTUS

A *praetor;* that is, a judicial magistrate of Rome. He is widely admired for his noble nature. He joins the conspiracy because he fears that Caesar will become a tyrant, but his idealism causes him to make several poor judgements and impedes his ability to understand those who are less scrupulous than he. Brutus defeats Octavius' force in the first battle at Philippi, but loses the second battle and commits suicide rather than be taken prisoner.

CASSIUS

The brother-in-law of Brutus and an acute judge of human nature, Cassius organize the conspiracy against Caesar and recruits Brutus by passionate argument and by deviously placed, forged letters. He argues that Antony should be assassinated along with Caesar that Antony should not speak at Caesar’s funeral and that he (Cassius) and Brutus should not fight at Philippi, but he eventually defers to Brutus in each instance. He is defeated by Antony at the first battle of Philippi, and he commits suicide when he mistakenly believes that Brutus has been defeated.

CICERO

A senator and a famous orator of Rome. He is calm and philosophical when he meets the excited Casca during the night of portentous tumult proceeding the day of the assassination. The triumvirs have him put to death.

CINNA

The conspirator who urges Cassius to bring "noble" Brutus into the conspiracy; he assists by placing some of Cassius' forged letters where Brutus will discover them.

LUCIUS

Brutus' young servant; Brutus treats him with understanding, gentleness, and tolerance.

DECIUS BRUTUS

The conspirator who persuades Caesar to attend the Senate on the day of the ides of March by fabricating a flattering interpretation of Calphurnia's portentous dream and by telling Caesar that the Senate intends to crown him king.

METELLUS CIMBER

The conspirator who attracts Caesar's attention by requesting that his brother's banishment be repealed, allowing the assassins to surround Caesar and thereby giving Casca the opportunity to stab him from behind.

TREBONIUS

The first of the conspirators to second Brutus' argument that Antony be spared, Trebonius lures Antony out of the Senate House so that the other conspirators can kill Caesar without having to fear Antony's intervention. Consequently, he is the only conspirator who does not actually stab Caesar.

PORTIA

The wife of Brutus and the daughter of Marcus Cato. She argues that those familial relationships make her strong enough to conceal Brutus' secrets, but on the morning of the assassination, she is extremely agitated by the fear that she will reveal what Brutus has told her. She commits suicide when she realizes that her husband's fortunes are doomed.

CAIUS LIGARIUS

No friend of Caesar's, he is inspired by Brutus' nobility to cast off his illness and join the conspirators in the early morning of the ides of March.

PUBLIUS

An elderly senator who arrives with the conspirators to escort Caesar to the Capitol. He is stunned as he witnesses the assassination. Brutus sends him out to tell the citizens that no one else will be harmed.

ARTEMIDORUS

He gives Caesar a letter as the emperor enters the Capitol; in the letter, he lists the conspirators by name and indicates that they intend to kill him, but Caesar does not read it.

POPILIUS LENA

The senator who wishes Cassius well in his "enterprise" as Caesar enters the Senate House. This comment intensifies the dramatic tension in the moments immediately prior to the assassination by causing Cassius and Brutus to briefly fear that they have been betrayed.

CINNA THE POET

On his way to attend Caesar's funeral, he is caught up in the riot caused by Antony's funeral oration. The mob at first confuses him with Cinna the conspirator, but even after they discover their error, they kill him anyway "for his bad verses."

OCTAVIUS CAESAR

The adopted son and heir of *Julius Caesar*; he is one of the triumvirs who rule following the death of Caesar. He and Antony lead the army that defeats Cassius and Brutus at Philippi.

M. AEMILIUS LEPIDUS

He joins Antony and Octavius to form the Second Triumvirate to rule the Roman Empire following the assassination of Caesar. He is weak, and Antony uses him essentially to run errands.

LUCILIUS

The officer who impersonates Brutus at the second battle of Philippi and is captured by Antony's soldiers. Antony admires his loyalty to Brutus and thus he protects him, hoping that Lucilius will choose to serve him as loyally as he did Brutus.

PINDARUS

At Philippi, he erroneously tells his master, Cassius, that the scout Titinius has been captured by the enemy when the scout has actually been greeted by the victorious forces of Brutus. Thinking that all is lost, Cassius decides to die; he has Pindarus kill him with the same sword that he used to help slay Caesar.

TITINIUS

An officer in the army commanded by Cassius and Brutus, he guards the tent at Sardis during the argument between the two generals, and is a scout at Philippi for Cassius. After Cassius commits suicide when he mistakenly believes Titinius to have been taken prisoner by the enemy, Titinius kills himself in emulation of Cassius.

MESSALA

A soldier serving under Brutus and Cassius, Messala gives information concerning the advance of the triumvirs, and he reports Portia's death to Brutus at Sardis. At Philippi, he hears Cassius confess that he believes in omens. Later, he discovers Cassius' body.

VARRO AND **CLAUDIUS**

Servants of Brutus, they spend the night in his tent at Sardis. Neither of them observes the ghost of Caesar that appears to Brutus.

YOUNG CATO

The son of Marcus Cato, the brother of Portia, the brother-in-law of Brutus, and a soldier in the army commanded by Brutus and Cassius. He dies during the second battle at Philippi while trying to inspire the army by loudly proclaiming that he is the son of Marcus Cato and that he is still fighting.

CLITUS AND **DARDANIUS**

Servants of Brutus, they refuse their master's request at Philippi to kill him.

VOLUMNIUS

A friend of Brutus and a soldier under his command at Philippi. He refuses to hold a sword for Brutus to impale himself on.

STRATO

The loyal servant who holds Brutus' sword so that he may commit suicide. Later, he becomes a servant to Octavius.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

CAESAR

In using *Julius Caesar* as a central figure, Shakespeare is less interested in portraying a figure of legendary greatness than he is in creating a character that is consistent with the other aspects of his drama. If Brutus and Cassius were eminently evil men insidiously planning the cold-blooded murder of an eminently admirable ruler, *Julius Caesar* would be little more than a melodrama of suspense and revenge. On the other hand, if Caesar were wholly the bloody tyrant, there would be little cause for Brutus' hesitation and no justification for Antony's thirst for revenge. In fact, Shakespeare creates in Caesar a character that is sometimes reasonable, sometimes superstitious, sometimes compassionate, and sometimes arrogantly aloof. In so doing, he has projected Caesar as a man whom the nobility have just reasons to fear, yet who is not a villain.

Flavius concludes his criticism of Caesar in Act I, Scene 1, by expressing his fear that Caesar desires to "soar above the view of men / and keep us all in servile fearfulness." His opinion is given credence when, moments later, Casca and Antony's attitude toward Caesar demonstrates that they consider him a man whose every wish should be considered a command by the citizens of Rome. Caesar's opinion of himself throughout shows that he complies with that attitude. He does not fear Cassius because he believes himself to be beyond the reach of mere humans, and he caps his explanation of his incapability of experiencing fear by observing, ". . . for always I am Caesar." However, his reference to his partial deafness provides an obvious contrast between the conceptions of the vain man who perceives himself in godlike terms and the actual, aging man who stands in imminent danger of assassination. His potential for evil is further emphasized by the swiftness with which he summarily has Flavius and Marullus "put to silence." Finally, at the very moment preceding his death, Caesar compares himself to the gods of Olympus in his determination to continue his arbitrary administration of Roman justice.

Caesar's teeming arrogance and pride more than offset his proven ability to reason. He expresses a fatalistic acceptance of the inevitability of death when he tells Calphurnia how strange it is to him "that men should fear; / seeing that death, a necessary end, / Will come when it will come." But it is not his belief that the hour of his death has been predetermined

and thus cannot be avoided that causes him to ignore the portents, his priests, and Calphurnia. Instead, he ignores them because of Decius' challenge to his sense of pride and to his ambition. Caesar, who is so perceptive in his analysis of Cassius, cannot always look "quite through the deeds" of a calculating deceiver.

From his first appearance, Caesar openly displays a superstitious nature, but also from the beginning he displays a propensity to ignore warnings and signs that should alert a man of his beliefs. He enters the action of the play by advising Calphurnia to seek a cure for her sterility by ritual, and he exits fifteen lines later, dismissing the soothsayer as "a dreamer." He ignores the soothsayer, Calphurnia, the many portents, his priests, and finally Artemidorus because he has ceased to think of himself as a fallible human being, and because he passionately wants to be crowned king. He does not fear Cassius, although he knows him to be a danger to political leaders, because he believes that he and Cassius occupy two separate levels of existence. Cassius is a man; Caesar, a demigod. He even comes to think of himself in terms of abstract qualities, considering himself older and more terrible even than "danger." His sense of superiority to his fellow humans, as well as his overriding ambition to be king, ultimately prevent him from observing and reasoning clearly.

Caesar as a viable character in the play endures beyond his assassination. Brutus wants to "come by Caesar's spirit / and not dismember Caesar." In fact, Brutus and the conspirators succeed in dismembering the corporeal Caesar, but they fail to destroy his spirit. Antony invokes the spirit of Caesar first in his soliloquy in Act III, Scene 1, and he uses it to bring the citizens of Rome to rebellion in Act III, Scene 2. The ghost of Caesar appears to Brutus at Sardis and again at Philippi, signifying that Brutus has failed to reconcile mentally and morally his participation in the murder, as well as signifying that his and Cassius' fortunes are fading. Caesar's spirit ceases to be a force in the play only when Cassius and Brutus commit suicide, each acknowledging that he does so to still the spirit of Caesar.

ANTONY

Prior to Caesar's assassination, Antony makes four brief appearances in which he speaks a total of five lines. Twice during Lupercal and again at Caesar's house, he makes short statements indicating that he is loyal to Caesar as dictator and as a friend. Caesar's confiding to Antony at Lupercal indicates that he trusts Antony and looks upon him as a friend in return, perhaps even as a protégé. Antony appears at the Capitol at the beginning of Act III, Scene 1, but he does not speak before Trebonius leads him out.

When, during Lupercal, Caesar describes Cassius as a dangerous man, Antony defends him as "a noble Roman and well given." While Antony does not perceive at that time that Cassius is dangerous, and later underestimates the determination of Octavius, as a ruler, he is a perceptive observer who verifies Cassius' assessment of him as being a "shrewd contriver." Following the assassination, Antony quickly grasps that he must deal with Brutus, and he has the shrewdness to take advantage of Brutus' naïveté. When he has his servant say that "Brutus is noble, wise, valiant, and honest," it is clear that Antony intends to flatter Brutus and to work upon those personal qualities of Brutus that represent moral

strengths, but that are also fundamental weaknesses when dealing with a more sophisticated man.

Antony's requests for safety and for an explanation for the murder are reasonable in the context of the situation, but Brutus' consent to provide both ensures that, upon returning to the Capitol, Antony can concentrate on his ultimate objective of gaining a forum. At the Capitol, by having Brutus repeat his promises, Antony succeeds in placing him on the defensive and in establishing a means to evade the more difficult questions being raised by Cassius. He is not in the slightest degree deterred by considerations of honesty when dealing with those whom he wishes to deceive or manipulate. He knows that Brutus wants to believe that he (Antony) will join the conspirators' cause, and he takes advantage of Brutus' hope when he falsely tells the conspirators, "Friends am I with you all, and love you all." He will also freely use half-truths and outright falsehoods to sway the mob at the Forum to do what he wants.

Antony faces danger in this meeting from Cassius, who knows him to be a "shrewd contriver," and from the other conspirators, who know him to be a friend of Caesar. He disposes of the threat of Cassius by directing his attention to the more powerful and gullible Brutus, whom he keeps on the defensive by repeating that he, will be friends if he receives a satisfactory explanation. He disposes of the remaining conspirators by boldly raising the subject of his apparent hypocrisy in making friends with his friend's murderers and by then shrewdly diverting his comments to the nobility of Caesar. This is much in the manner that he will turn the citizens to rebellion by professing that he does not want to stir them up. Antony, in reality, wants two things: to avenge Caesar's murder and to rule Rome. In order to do both, he must first undermine public confidence in the republicans, and second, he must drive them from power by creating a chaotic situation that will allow him to seize power in their place. The method he chooses is to gain permission to speak at Caesar's funeral, and that is the sole reason he plays the role he does in the Capitol.

In his soliloquy in the Capitol, Antony reveals that he intends to create civil strife throughout Italy, and in his oration he sets it off to a promising start. He is thoroughly the politically expedient man in his speech. He wants to create rebellion and overthrow the republicans so that he and Octavius can fill the vacuum, and he succeeds to the fullest measure. From his soliloquy in the Capitol until the end of the play, he is constantly ambitious, confident, successful, and exceptionally ruthless. He has no concern for the welfare of the citizens of Rome who will suffer in the civil strife he has instigated, he is willing to have a nephew put to death rather than argue for his life, he seeks to keep as much as he can of Caesar's legacy to the poor of Rome, and he openly acknowledges that he will remove Lepidus from power as soon as Lepidus is no longer of use to him.

He has some personality conflict with Octavius, but he is able to relegate it to the background so that their differences are always secondary to their struggle to defeat Brutus and Cassius. Antony is also particularly adept at locating the most advantageous point of attack in all of his confrontations. In the Capitol, rather than confront all of the conspirators, he concentrates on Brutus' naive sense of honour and nobility. In the Forum, rather than construct a reasoned argument against the assassins, he appeals to the emotion with which he saw the crowd respond to Brutus' speech. At Philippi, when Brutus leaves Cassius' army exposed, Antony

attacks immediately. At the conclusion of the play, when Brutus and Cassius are dead and the republicans thoroughly defeated, he publicly praises Brutus in order to set about healing the political wounds of Rome. Ironically, Brutus hoped to remove arbitrary government from Rome by the assassination, but by murdering Caesar, he established the conditions for an even more ruthless tyranny to seize power in the persons of

ANTONY AND OCTAVIUS

OCTAVIUS

Julius Caesar is its own frame of reference, and a knowledge of Roman history is not essential to an understanding of the play. However, Shakespeare does construct the character of Octavius by highlighting those aspects of his personality that will predominate later in his political and military conflicts with Antony and in his role as the Emperor Augustus. In order to stabilize the political situation in Rome following the assassination and to solidify the triumvirs' control of government, Octavius is willing to conduct a ruthless reign of terror during which the opponents to the triumvirs are methodically slaughtered, but not all of those on the proscription list are actual enemies. Some are simply wealthy Romans who are condemned as "traitors" and executed in order that the triumvirs may confiscate their estates as a means of raising money to finance their armies. It is, nevertheless, noteworthy that the future Augustus does not volunteer members of his own immediate family to the list, although he does insist on the death of Lepidus' brother and does not object to the inclusion of Antony's nephew.

Octavius exhibits creditable insight in his observation that all who currently act friendly to the triumvirs are not indeed friends and in his attitude toward Antony throughout the play. He knows that he is in a power struggle with Antony that will intensify after they have defeated their enemies, and he knows enough about Antony's thirst for power to protect himself from domination by Antony. Consequently, he is not reluctant to disagree with Antony, as he demonstrates in his defense of Lepidus ("he's a tried and valiant soldier"), in his pointing to Antony's error in predicting that Brutus and Cassius would not come to Philippi, and in his insistence that he will fight on the right-hand side of the battlefield at Philippi and not the left-hand side as Antony orders. However, Octavius does not let his determination to remain independent interfere with following Antony's advice when he realizes that Antony speaks from experience, as he demonstrates in agreeing to allow Antony to make Lepidus a junior partner in the Triumvirate, in agreeing with Antony that the most important matter at hand following the assassination is to prepare to meet the republican armies, and in accepting Antony's decision that they should fight from defensive positions at Philippi and allow the enemy to initiate the battle.

Octavius is shrewd in his political assessments and in his relationship with Antony. He is decisive in executing the proscription and in preparing to meet Brutus and Cassius. He is also supremely confident that he will succeed in defeating his enemies at Philippi and in organizing a successful new government of Rome.

BRUTUS

Brutus is the most complex of the characters in this play. He is proud of his reputation for honour and nobleness, but he is not always practical, and is often naive. He is the only major character in the play intensely committed to fashioning his behaviour to fit a strict moral and ethical code, but he take actions that are unconsciously hypocritical. One of the significant themes that Shakespeare uses to enrich the complexity of Brutus involves his attempt to ritualize the assassination of Caesar. He cannot justify, to his own satisfaction, the murder of a man who is a friend and who has not excessively misused the powers of his office. Consequently, thinking of the assassination in terms of a quasi-religious ritual instead of cold-blooded murder makes it more acceptable to him. Unfortunately for him, he consistently misjudges the people and the citizens of Rome; he believes that they will be willing to consider the assassination in abstract terms.

Brutus is guided in all things by his concepts of honour. He speaks of them often to Cassius, and he is greatly disturbed when events force him to act in a manner inconsistent with them. Consider his anguish when he drinks a toast with Caesar while wearing a false face to hide his complicity in the conspiracy. Ironically, his widely reputed honour is what causes Cassius to make an all-out effort to bring him into an enterprise of debatable moral respectability. Brutus' reputation is so great that it will act to convince others who are as yet undecided to join.

Brutus' concentration on honourable and noble behaviour also leads him into assuming a naive view of the world. He is unable to see through the roles being played by Cassius, Casca, and Antony. He does not recognize the bogus letters as having been sent by Cassius, although they contain sentiments and diction that would warn a more perceptive man. He underestimates Antony as an opponent, and he loses control over the discussion at the Capitol following the assassination by meeting Antony's requests too readily. Brutus as a naive thinker is most clearly revealed in the scene in the Forum. He presents his reasons for the assassination, and he leaves believing that he has satisfied the Roman citizens with his reasoned oration. He does not realize that his speech has only moved the mob emotionally; it has not prodded them to make reasoned assessments of what the conspirators have done.

Brutus is endowed with qualities that could make him a successful private man but that limit him severely, even fatally, when he endeavours to compete in public life with those who do not choose to act with the same ethical and moral considerations. In his scene with Portia, Brutus shows that he has already become alienated with his once happy home life because of his concentration on his "enterprise," which will eventually cause him to lose everything except the belief that he has acted honourably and nobly. In the tent at Sardis, after learning of Portia's death and believing that Cassius is bringing discredit on the republican cause, Brutus becomes most isolated. His private life is destroyed, and he also has difficulty avoiding the taint of dishonour in his public life.

Brutus makes moral decisions slowly, and he is continually at war with himself even after he has decided on a course of action. He has been thinking about the problem that Caesar represents to Roman liberty for an unspecified time when the play opens. After Cassius raises the subject and asks for Brutus' commitment, he requests time to think the matter over, and

a month later, speaking alone in his orchard, he reveals that he has since thought of little else. He has trouble arriving at a decision whether to participate in the assassination, he expresses contradictory attitudes towards the conspiracy, he attempts to "purify" the murder through ritual, and he condemns Cassius' money-raising practices while asking for a share. His final words, "Caesar, now be still: I killed not thee with half so good a will," are almost a supplication for an end to his mental torture.

On the other hand, Brutus characteristically makes decisions that are essential to his and Cassius' success with much less forethought, and after he's committed to a plan, he does not waiver. He quickly takes command of the conspiracy and makes crucial decisions regarding Cicero and Antony. He does not, however, make adequate plans to solidify republican control of government following the assassination, and he too readily agrees to allow Antony to speak.

Brutus' character is made even more complex by his unconscious hypocrisy. He has conflicting attitudes toward the conspiracy, but he becomes more favourable following his becoming a member of the plot against Caesar. He attacks Cassius for raising money dishonestly, yet he demands a portion. Nevertheless, at the end, Brutus is a man who nobly accepts his fate. He dismisses the ghost of Caesar at Sardis. He chooses personal honour over a strict adherence to an abstract philosophy. He reacts calmly and reasonably to Cassius' death, as he had earlier in a moment of crisis when Popilius revealed that the conspiracy was no longer secret. In his last moments, he has the satisfaction of being certain in his own mind that he has been faithful to the principles embodying the honour and nobility on which he has placed so much value throughout his life.

CASSIUS

The most significant characteristic of Cassius is his ability to perceive the true motives of men. Caesar says of him, "He reads much; / He is a great observer and he looks / Quite through the deeds of men." The great irony surrounding Cassius throughout the play is that he nullifies his greatest asset when he allows Brutus to take effective control of the republican faction.

Cassius believes that the nobility of Rome are responsible for the government of Rome. They have allowed a man to gain excessive power; therefore, they have the responsibility to stop him, and with a man of Caesar's well-known ambition, that can only mean assassination.

Cassius intensely dislikes Caesar personally, but he also deeply resents being subservient to a tyrant, and there are indications that he would fight for his personal freedom under any tyrant. He does not resent following the almost dictatorial pronouncements of his equal, Brutus, although he does disagree heatedly with most of Brutus' tactical decisions. To accomplish his goal of removing Caesar from power, he resorts to using his keen insight into human nature to deceive Brutus by means of a long and passionate argument, coupled with bogus notes. In the conversation, he appeals to Brutus' sense of honour, nobility, and pride more than he presents concrete examples of Caesar's tyrannical actions. Later, he is more outrightly devious in the use of forged notes, the last of which prompts Brutus to leave off contemplation and to join the conspiracy. Cassius later uses similar means to bring Casca into the plot.

Throughout the action, Cassius remains relatively unconcerned with the unscrupulous means he is willing to use to further the republican cause, and at Sardis, he and Brutus come almost to breaking up their alliance because Brutus objects to his ways of collecting revenue to support the armies. Cassius sees Brutus as the catalyst that will unite the leading nobles in a conspiracy, and he makes the recruitment of Brutus his first priority. Ironically, his success leads directly to a continuous decline of his own influence within the republican camp.

Clearly, Cassius has his negative aspects. He envies Caesar; he becomes an assassin; and he will consent to bribery, sell commissions, and impose ruinous taxation to raise money. But he also has a certain nobility of mind that is generally recognized. When Caesar tells Antony that Cassius is dangerous, Antony answers, "Fear him not, Caesar; he's not dangerous. / He's a noble Roman and well given." He was no doubt expressing sentiments popular at the time. Cassius is also highly emotional. He displays extreme hatred in his verbal attack on Caesar during Lupercal; he almost loses control because of fear when Popilius reveals that the conspirators' plans have been leaked; he gives vent to anger in his argument with Brutus in the tent at Sardis; he expresses an understanding tolerance of the poet who pleads for him and Brutus to stop their quarrel; and he threatens suicide repeatedly and finally chooses self-inflicted death to humiliating capture by Antony and Octavius. When he becomes a genuine friend of Brutus following the reconciliation in the tent, he remains faithful and refuses to blame Brutus for the dilemma that he encounters at Philippi, even though he has reason to do so. Of all the leading characters in *Julius Caesar*, Cassius develops most as the action progresses. At the end of Act I, Scene 2, he is a passionate and devious manipulator striving to use Brutus to gain his ends. By the end of Act IV, Scene 3, he is a calm friend of Brutus who will remain faithful to their friendship until death.

CRITICAL ESSAYS MAJOR THEMES

Explore the different themes within William Shakespeare's tragic play, *Julius Caesar*. Themes are central to understanding *Julius Caesar* as a play and identifying Shakespeare's social and political commentary.

PERSUASION

Persuasion is a concept at the centre of this play. Everyone seems to be trying to convince someone else of something: Caesar tries to create an image in the public's mind of his crowing (an ancient form of spin doctoring); Cassius finds the best way to manipulate each man he seeks to bring to his side; and Brutus, whom the reader hopes will refuse to participate, takes longer than the others to respond to Cassius' manipulations, but eventually does respond and even finishes the job for him by persuading himself (see his soliloquy in Act II, Scene I). This pivotal scene, when Brutus joins the conspirators, is also interesting because Portia, Brutus' wife, serves as the voice of Brutus' conscience.

Leadership

Shakespeare took the potential for upheaval in *Julius Caesar* and used it to examine a leadership theme. Concentrating on the

responsibilities of the ruling class, he looked at what could happen if that class no longer had a unified vision and hand lost sight of what it meant to be Roman. In fact, the characters of the play lose touch with the tradition, glory, integrity, and stoicism of their past. As you read the play, note the way that Cassius use the memory of that glorious past to persuade men to become conspirators, and the way the actions of the conspirators do or do not return Rome to its golden age.

DEFINING MASCULINITY

While gender itself is not a central issue to this play, questions of Masculinity and effeminacy are. Caesar's weakness — his effeminacy — makes him vulnerable. On the other hand, the incorporation of the so-called feminine traits of compassion and love into the friendship between Brutus and Cassius paradoxically allows the men to show greater strength and allows the audience to have greater sympathy for them.

WEATHER AS A MAJOR SYMBOL

On the eve of the Ides of March a storm is raging in Rome (Act I, Scene 3). It's a storm unlike any other. Fire falls from the skies, bodies spontaneously combust, lions roam the capital, ghostly women walk the streets, and the night owl was seen shrieking in the daylight. Shakespeare uses storms to create a mood of darkness and foreboding, but here he takes it one step further. The turmoil of the heavens is directly representative of the turmoil present in the state and in the minds of men. The raging storm, coupled with the eerie sights that Casca describes, are signs of disharmony in heaven and on earth.

THE QUESTION OF LEADERSHIP

Who's in charge, which ought to be in charge, and how well are those in charge doing? These are central questions in *Julius Caesar*. The Elizabethan expectation would be that the ruling class ought to rule and that they ought to rule in the best interests of the people. Such is not the case in the Rome of this play. Barely controlled chaos has come to Rome, and this unsettled state is personified in the first scene of *Julius Caesar* through the characters of the cobbler and the carpenter. These characters give readers a sense that the people themselves are a sort of amorphous mass, potentially dangerous and, at the same time, absolutely essential to the success of the ruling class. Throughout the play, they are addressed: Caesar must give them entertainment and seeks their approbation for his crowning; Brutus recognizes that he must explain his actions to them, and Antony uses them for his own purposes. Yet, despite the plebeians' surging power, real chaos actually lies in the failure of the ruling class to exercise their authority properly and to live by the accepted rules of hierarchy and order.

These same threats and concerns resonated to an Elizabethan audience. At the time this play was performed in 1599, civil strife was within living memory. Henry VIII's reformation of the Church of England had brought violence and unrest to the country. In addition, despite all of his efforts, Henry had not provided a living and legitimate male heir for England. At his death, his daughter Mary returned the church to the bosom

of Rome, demanding that her subjects align themselves with Catholicism. When Mary, too, died without heir, her sister, Elizabeth, took the throne. What followed was a long period, from 1548 to her death in 1603, of relative peace and prosperity. However, Elizabeth's subjects experienced unease during her reign. She was, after all, a woman, and according to the Elizabethan understanding of order, men ruled women, not the other way around.

Her subjects wished for Elizabeth to marry for a number of reasons. They would have felt much more secure knowing that a man was in charge, but further, they were tired of worries over succession. A legitimate heir was necessary. The Queen, on the other hand, over the period of her fertility refused the suits of a number of appropriate men, knowing that once married, she would no longer rule the realm. By the time this play was performed Elizabeth was an old woman, well beyond the age of childbearing. Even then, she refused to name an heir and the country worried that they would face another period of unrest at her death.

But even without this historical context, Elizabethans would have been interested in questions of order and hierarchy — questions raised by the political upheaval of *Julius Caesar*. The Elizabethan worldview was one in which everyone had their place. In many ways, they understood the world in terms of the family unit. God was the head of the heavenly family, with Jesus as his son. The monarch was subservient only to God, receiving power to head the English family from Him. The monarch's subjects maintained their kingdoms through the various levels of society and finally into their own homes, with men ruling their wives and wives ruling their children. Elizabethan thinking went so far as to order all living things in a hierarchy known as the *Great Chain of Being*, from God and the various levels of angels right through to the lowliest animal. In such a rigidly structured society it is entirely understandable that its members would be interested in exploring and examining the potentials of and the excitement that would be provided by an inversion of that order.

On the other hand, while it would have been acceptable to examine this relatively objective philosophical issue in the public theatre, it would have been much less acceptable (to say the least) to set it within the context of the history of their own period. No direct questioning of England's state or monarch would have been possible. Playwrights of the time were aware of the dilemma and crafted their plays so that they would not offend. The setting of this play, therefore, in ancient Rome was the perfect answer. The story, taken from the Roman historian, Plutarch's, work called *Lives*, was well known to Shakespeare's audience, full of drama and conflict, and was sufficiently distant in time to allow both Shakespeare and his audience to operate in safety.

At the point in ancient history in which *Julius Caesar* is set, Rome was becoming slightly more democratic — well, democratic in their terms, not in modern ones. Tribunes, meant as representatives of the people, were being elected in order to protect them from the rigors of tyranny. Thus, to have a man like Caesar, charismatic and fresh from military triumph, come into the city and begin to establish him as a supreme ruler was a dangerous trend. It is not surprising, then, that Flavius and Marullus behave as they do at the beginning of the play. They are, in effect, doing their job properly and to an Elizabethan audience their behaviour, despite its autocratic tone to a modern reader's ears, would have been perfectly acceptable and should have been met with obedience and respect. The carpenter and cobbler,

however, are barely under control and show little respect, although they do ultimately obey.

But it is not the masses that are the problem in this play. The real failure is that the ruling class does not rule properly. Instead of uniting for the good of the people as they ought to, they imagine themselves as individuals forming small splinter groups that, in the end undermine genuine authority. By disabling themselves in this way, the aristocratic class can still manipulate unruly plebeians but cannot keep them in check.

As a member of that class, Brutus is as much at fault as anyone else. It is, in fact, tempting to think of Brutus as an entirely sympathetic character. At the end of the play, the audience hears extravagant words of praise: "This was the noblest Roman of them all" and "This was a man." By this point, however, readers ought to mistrust their reactions to such praise. Antony and Octavius have shown themselves to be perfectly capable of using and misusing language in order to establish their own positions, and the play has given ample evidence of a tendency to objectify the dead rather than to remember them as they actually were.

To be fair, there are gradations of character fault in this play and Brutus is more sympathetic than other characters. He does indeed believe that what he has done by murdering Caesar was necessary, and believes that anyone who hears his rationale will side with him. His very naïveté suggests innocence. On the other hand, upon examining his soliloquy in Act II, Scene 1, note that Brutus must do a fair amount to convince himself that Caesar must die: He has to admit that Caesar has not yet done anything wrong and so decides that his violent act will be peremptory, heading off the inevitable results of Caesar's ambition. Brutus' dilemma is that he has bought into the belief that if one lives life entirely by a philosophy — in his case one of logic and reason — everyone will be all right. He denies any other viewpoint and so is as blinded as Caesar is deaf. Before praising Brutus as Antony does after his death, remember that Brutus brought himself and the state of Rome to a point of such instability.

Antony, another member of that ruling class, is also one of the more sympathetic characters of the play. But is he a good ruler? The audience may like him for his emotion. His outrage at the murder of Caesar and his tears over Caesar's corpse are undoubtedly genuine. His revenge is partly fuelled by the horror and anger he feels at the outrage and the reader is drawn to such loyalty. In addition, the skill that he exhibits in his manipulation of theatrical effects and language during his funeral oration is powerful and attractive. Yet, Antony is culpable too. While his emotional response is undoubtedly justified, it, too, contributes to unrest and political instability. While he, Octavius, and Lepidus ultimately form a triumvirate to return the state to stability, in fact, that it is a ruling structure fraught with problems. Lepidus is weak and a power struggle is on the horizon for Antony and Octavius.

FEMALE ROLES

"This was a man" is Antony's final tribute to Brutus. Brutus' reputation, damaged as it has been by his participation in the conspiracy and by his rather self-deluding rationale for it, has been reclaimed. It has been reclaimed partially because his character, defined at the beginning of the play as entirely masculine, has taken on some feminine characteristics, such as grief over his wife's death, love for his friend, and tender concern

for his followers. By the end of the play, Brutus' character is more fully-rounded but is the world he leaves us better off? Can it be when the world left behind is entirely without women? Shakespeare takes the opportunity in *Julius Caesar* to say both "yes" and "no." At times, characters take on so-called feminine characteristics and lose their ability to rule well. At other times, characters like Brutus gain a great deal from incorporating the feminine into their own personalities. Shakespeare's suggestion is that while a balance can be struck and an ideal attained, it is ultimately unworkable.

You find only two female characters in *Julius Caesar*. The first, Calphurnia, is Caesar's wife, and is emblematic of one standard sexist Elizabethan understanding of woman. She is a shrew. She controls instead of being controlled. She exists as a foil for her husband's character. By her strength, the audience sees what Caesar ought to be; by her conscience, what his ought to be; by her death, what he ought to be prepared to do. For this reason, her character is not developed on a psychological level in the way that Caesar's is.

The reader's first contact with her is during the feast of Lupercal. Caesar asks Antony to touch her as he passes her in the race that is a part of the celebrations. Caesar asks this because Calphurnia is childless, and superstition dictates that the touch of the athlete during this holy feast will make her fertile. The implication, then, is that she is at fault for not producing an heir. In fact, the implication is that Caesar is no longer potent enough to impregnate her. His request of the athletic womanizer, Antony, is an indication of Caesar's own effeminacy.

Such is the root of Caesar's downfall. He has taken on too many feminine characteristics. His prowess is in the past and is only momentarily evident in Act II, Scene 2 when he refuses to listen to Calphurnia's worries about what will happen if he goes to the Capitol. "Caesar shall forth. The things that threatened me Ne'er looked but on my back; when they shall see The face of Caesar, they are vanished." However, he is convinced; bowing to her hysteria and his mind is changed only after Decius embarrasses him. "t were a mock Apt to be rendered for someone to say / 'Break up the Senate till another time, When Caesar's wife shall meet with better dreams.'" On to his own death.

Portia is a much more interesting character on her own and yet she, too, is really only portrayed through her relationship with men. Her relationship with her husband is clearly one of intimacy and respect. She speaks openly with him about the unrest he has recently exhibited and forces him to speak to her and tell her what is going on.

Note, however, how she does this. Brutus does not want her to know what is going on. She changes his mind by pressing him to define her in one of the two ways in which a woman can be defined in this society: She is either a good Roman woman worthy of his secrets, well-wived and well-fathered, or she is "Brutus' harlot." Faced with this distinction, Brutus can only choose to tell her what is happening. Unfortunately for Portia, the knowledge that he imparts is her downfall. In Act II, Scene 4 Portia complains that she has "a man's mind, but a woman's might." She has been given access to a man's knowledge but because of her position as a woman, she is unable to use it and must sit and wait for the outcome of men's affairs. Such knowledge is too much for her and she commits suicide in the very garden in which she first heard Brutus' secrets.

With this, Portia is gone from the play, and the reader never again sees a female character. What the audience does see, however, is transference of Portia's feminine qualities to her husband by means of his relationship with Cassius. At the beginning of the play, the relationship between these two men was less than profound. They are connected by a common desire to overturn Caesar's tyranny but have entirely different motivations. In addition, Cassius' approach toward convincing Brutus to join him has been cynical to say the least.

By Act IV, Scene 2, their relationship has become a friendship, and it has become a friendship that has the decided qualities of a love relationship. In Act IV, Scene 2, and Brutus has taken offense at what he believes been Cassius' refusal to send money when he needed it. Cassius is quite taken aback by this accusation and the conversation quickly descends into a "yes you did, no I didn't" affair that almost results in a fight. Cassius is innocent of the offense and is hurt that he is "Hated by one he loves, braved by his brother."

What motivates Brutus to this anger? It turns out that it is grief over Portia's death. It is to Cassius that Brutus turns in his grief. The grief that he feels, the loss, the sense of betrayal are all translated into anger toward this friend, and after those emotions are spent, the two men are closer in some ways than Brutus ever was with Portia. The latter relationship shares the same respect for each other and the same sharing of intimacy, yet it is a relationship that can operate in the same spheres because it encompasses a level of equality not possible between a woman and a man.

From that moment, the audience has an increasing amount of sympathy for Brutus, who has been humanized by his wife's death. While he clearly loved his wife, there was also some distance between them, partly because of her rather stoic nature (remember her self-wounding), partly because he is unwilling to confide in her. This combination of the masculine and the feminine in her character was not a completely appropriate one. It was unworkable given the way in which the Roman world worked. The flip side, of course, was Caesar's behaviour. His combination of femininity and masculinity was also unworkable. With their deaths, Brutus is able to incorporate both aspects of their personalities, most directly from his wife, given her more moral nature. With the banishment of women and inappropriate femininity from Rome, the state ought to be a better one. But there is an unattractive sterility to such a world. What has been created is an unworkable ideal. Brutus' death is an indication of just how unworkable it is.

Theater within a Theater

How many ages hence
Shall this our lofty scene be acted over,
In states unborn and accents yet unknown!

Cassius speaks these words in Act 3, Scene 1 just as he convinces the exultant conspirators to smear their hands with Caesar's blood. At this moment of highest drama, one of the chief actors of this piece draws attention to its theatricality. Why?

It is a common trope of Elizabethan thinking to draw attention to life's fictions. Queen Elizabeth staged many public processions and scenes and created and lived the role of the Virgin Queen. Her subjects were both her fellow actors and her audience. Playwrights of the time, and Shakespeare in particular, made use of this metaphor in a number of ways. In *Julius Caesar*, theatricality is both an example of one of the major

themes of the play, persuasion, and a comment on the deterioration of the state of Rome. A number of characters use theatre in an attempt to persuade.

During the first meeting of Cassius and Brutus, (Act I, Scene 2), they hear a number of shouts. Later in the scene, Casca enters and reports on the offstage theatre that has taken place. Caesar has staged a mock refusal of the crown, thinking that he will build a desire in his audience (the plebeians) that he eventually accept it. Think of this as someone refusing an award, saying, "Oh no, I couldn't possibly . . . oh no . . . well, if you insist." (For another example of this dramatic effect, one which works more successfully for the protagonist, see Shakespeare's *Richard III.*) Caesar's stage managing backfires though, and instead of acclaiming him, the people behave like a real audience passing judgement on the quality of the spectacle. "If the tag-rag people did not clap him and hiss him / according as he pleased and displeased them, as they use to / do the players in the theatre." Caesar's performance isn't good enough. It proves his superficiality. The people perceive this and refuse to accept him as their ruler.

Antony is much more successful with his theatrics. Unfortunately, Brutus does not recognize what Antony is up to when he asks to give Caesar's funeral oration in Act III, Scene 2. The opportunity to stage a scene is evident to the reader and to at least one of the conspirators, Cassius, who tries to dissuade Brutus, but to no avail. Imagine the power of Antony's entrance as he bears Caesar's body in his arms. This is an exhibition meant to move an audience and it works. Antony's persuasive rhetoric that follows allows him to realize his objective: to incite the mob to revolt against the conspirators, with another showy scene. When Antony gradually uncovers Caesar's body and exposes its wounds, the first Plebeian responds with "O piteous spectacle" and that is precisely what it is. By means of the theatrical, then, the people have been convinced to act, not in their own best interests but in the interests of Antony, Octavius, and Lepidus. Theatre’s power has been to continue the strife rather than to resolve it. To an Elizabethan audience, such dramatic tension would have been both threatening and seductive.

STUDY HELP ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. Describe the changes that occur in the friendship between Cassius and Brutus.

2. The characters in this play are very concerned with what it was and is to be Roman. What role does tradition play in *Julius Caesar*?

3. Does Caesar have any real impact on the action of the play? Before his death? After his death?

4. What role does the supernatural play?

UNIT-VI
THE *WINTER'S TALE*

STRUCTURE

Play Summary
About *The Winter's Tale*
Character List
Structure and Absurdity in The *Winter's Tale*
Study Help Essay Questions

PLAY SUMMARY

Archidamus, a lord of Bohemia, and Camillo, a lord of Sicilia, talk about their respective countries. Archidamus says that if Camillo were to visit Bohemia he would discover great differences between their countries. Camillo replies that he thinks that his king, Leontes, is planning a trip to Bohemia in the summer. Abashed by how little Bohemia has to offer in comparison to Sicilia, Archidamus imagines himself serving drinks that would make the visitors so sleepy that they would not notice the barrenness of Bohemia. The lords also discuss the lifelong friendship of their two Kings, as well as the virtues of the two young princes.

Camillo then joins a group that is composed of the two kings, Leontes and Polixenes, Leontes' family, and some attendants. Polixenes, King of Bohemia, is thanking Leontes for his extended hospitality in Sicilia and insisting that he, Polixenes, must return to his country's responsibilities. When it is clear that Polixenes will not yield to Leontes' entreaties to stay for a longer visit, Leontes urges his wife, Hermione, to join the effort. Hermione succeeds in persuading Polixenes to stay.

Leontes seems delighted that Hermione has convinced Polixenes to stay, but suddenly he reveals that he is jealous of Polixenes. Seeing that Leontes is upset, Hermione and Polixenes ask him what is wrong. Leontes, however, avoids a truthful answer by claiming that he is merely remembering when he was the age of his son. The two kings then compare their love for their sons.

Leontes takes a walk with his son, Mamillius, thinking that this will set up Polixenes and Hermione for a compromising situation. Hermione, however, innocently discloses where she and Polixenes will be, and Leontes indulges in satiric swipes at her imagined infidelity. Then he sends Mamillius off to play, before asking for Camillo's assessment of the relationship between Hermione and Polixenes. Camillo's straightforward responses, however, are twisted by the jealous King and Camillo protests: The imagined bawdiness which Leontes interprets from his wife's and Polixenes' actions are wrong. The King lashes out at Camillo, and Camillo humbly begs for a reappraisal of his reliability as an observer for the king. When Leontes insists upon a confirmation of Hermione's infidelity, a shocked Camillo criticizes his King.

Leontes then tries to extract an agreement that his list of observed actions (between Hermione and Polixenes) proves that his wife's and Polixenes' affair is a reality. Camillo urges the king to heal "this diseased opinion," but Leontes cannot be convinced. He suggests that Camillo poison Polixenes. Camillo admits that he could do it, but he states that he will never believe that Hermione was unfaithful. Camillo agrees to poison Polixenes if Leontes promises not to reveal what he believes about Hermione. Leontes promises, then joins the innocent couple.

Alone, Camillo speaks of his hopeless position. Approached by Polixenes to explain Leontes' changed attitude, Camillo convinces Polixenes that they must flee together or they will both be killed by Leontes.

Act II opens some time later with an obviously pregnant Hermione resting in the company of her son, Mamillius, and two ladies-in-waiting. When Hermione requests a story, Mamillius suggests a tale about "sprites and goblins," a tale suitable for winter.

As Mamillius begins the story, Leontes and Antigonus enter with a group of attendants. Leontes clearly believes that the hasty departure of Camillo and Polixenes is confirmation of his suspicions about Hermione's affair with Polixenes. He orders Mamillius to be kept away from his mother, and he accuses Hermione of being pregnant by Polixenes. Ignoring Hermione's protests, Leontes orders her to be imprisoned. She bravely accepts her fate and exits with the guards.

Beset by protests from his astonished advisers, Leontes insists that they refuse to see the evidence before them. The king quiets the protesters by revealing that he has sent for an interpretation from the oracle at Delphos.

After the birth of Hermione's baby (a girl), Paulina, the wife of one of the lords of Sicilia, Antigonus, attempts to persuade Leontes to retract his accusations as she presents his beautiful, innocent baby to him. But she selects a poor time to approach Leontes. He has just stated that killing Hermione would allow him to sleep again, and he has resolved not to worry about his sick son lest he be distracted from his commitment to revenge. Paulina refuses to listen to the warnings of her husband and her attendants.

Leontes, however, responds as Paulina was warned he would. Her arguments in favour of the queen and baby escalate his tyranny. He then tries to pit Antigonus against Paulina, ordering him to take the bastard child and Paulina away. Antigonus protests that no man can control his wife. When Leontes orders that the baby be thrown into a fire, Antigonus negotiates a chance for the baby to live — if Leontes will spare the baby's life, Antigonus promises to do anything that Leontes requests. Vowing to kill both Paulina and Antigonus if Antigonus fails to obey, Leontes orders Antigonus to take the baby to a remote place and abandon her to Fate. Antigonus doubts that this "fate" is better than a quick death, but he agrees to leave the baby to the mercy of wild animals, and he exits to carry out Leontes' command.

No sooner has Antigonus left than a servant announces the return of the messengers from Delphos.

Act III opens with Cleomentes and Dion talking about the awesome experience that they shared at Delphos. Both men hope that Apollo has declared Hermione innocent, and they hurry off to deliver the sealed message from the oracle.

Leontes orders that his wife be brought in to hear the reading of the oracle's decision, fully expecting that she will be found guilty as charged and, thus, he will be cleared from the stigma of tyranny. Clements and Dion swear that they have brought the message from Delphos without breaking the sea.

The message declares that Hermione, Polixenes, Camillo and the baby are all innocent. It further states that Leontes is "a jealous tyrant" and asserts that "the King shall live without an heir, if that which is lost be not found." Leontes declares that the message contains no truth, and he orders the trial to proceed. Just then, a servant announces that Mamillius has died. Hermione seems to faint, and Paulina announces that the news has killed the queen.

Leontes repents and orders Hermione to be tended to with the belief that she will recover. He then announces his intention to make peace with his old friend Polixenes, to woo Hermione, and to recall Camillo. He declares Camillo a good and faithful servant who was right to disobey his order to poison Polixenes.

Paulina enters, wailing over the death of Hermione and attacking Leontes for his dreadful, tyrannical edicts. She says that the king should embark on a life of repentance as a result of what he has done to his family. Leontes replies that he deserves all that she has said and more. Paulina then expresses regret for her attack because she detects the remorse that the king is feeling. She says she will remind him no more of the death of Hermione and his two children.

Leontes asks that he be taken to view the bodies of his dead wife and son. He declares that they shall share the same tomb, and he vows that he will visit the tomb each day to weep.

In the next scene, we discover that Antigonus and the infant are still alive, for Antigonus is seeking assurance that his ship has indeed arrived at "the deserts of Bohemia." He and a seaman look at the sky and agree that a brewing storm may portend heavenly anger if they abandon the helpless infant; they also agree that they do not like their task. Antigonus promises to hurry.

Antigonus then describes his nightmare to the infant. Her mother, he says, appeared to him in a dream, a figure of sorrow. The dream figure requested that he leave the baby in Bohemia and that he name her Perdita. Then she informed him that because of this task, he would never again see his wife. Antigonus concludes that Hermione is dead and that Polixenes is the father of the baby. After uttering best wishes for the baby and regret for his actions, Antigonus runs off stage, chased by a bear.

A shepherd enters, despairing the wrenching and fighting of all male youths between the ages of ten and twenty-three. When he sees Perdita, he assumes that she is an abandoned child born out of wedlock. He pities the baby so much, though, that he decides to keep her. The shepherd then calls for his son, who is identified in the script only as "clown." The boy tells his father about two sites that have shaken him the drowning of an entire crew of a ship (the one that brought Antigonus and Perdita to Bohemia) and a man (Antigonus) consumed by a bear. The shepherd turns his son's attention to the baby, whom he surmises is, somehow, linked to a fortune. The boy opens the baby's wrappings and discovers gold. Urging his father to take the baby home, the boy is inspired by their sudden good fortune to return and bury the remains of Antigonus.

The Chorus narrates that a bridge in time occurs at the opening of Act IV, and it also summarizes the highlights of an interim of sixteen years. Then, Polixenes and Camillo enter in the middle of an argument about Camillo's decision to return to Leontes after his long sixteen-year separation. Polixcnes warns him that returning could be fatal to Camillo. Besides, he needs Camillo. Camillo, however, wants to return to his native country for he is growing old, and he thinks that he can comfort the now-repentant Leontes.

Polixenes agrees that his penitent "brother" has a sad history, but asks consideration for his own sad lot — that is, having a son who is 11 ungracious." Camillo acknowledges that he has not seen the prince (Florizel) for three days and does not know where the young man spends his time. The king says that he has been informed that Florizel spends a good deal of time at the home of a shepherd who has somehow acquired great wealth. They both guess that Florizel must be attracted to the shepherd's beautiful young daughter. Polixenes persuades Camillo to help him discover what Florizel is up to.

Autolycus then enters, singing a song of hope and high spirits. He identifies himself as a peddler of oddities, and also as one who makes his living by cheating fools. On cue, the "clown" (the shepherd's son) enters, trying to calculate his budget and remember his shopping list for the upcoming sheep-shearing feast.

Autolycus dupes the clown by pretending that he has been beaten, robbed, and then clothed in his despicable rags. The clown is sorry for Autolycus and offers him money. Then he hastens off to buy his supplies. Autolycus chortles about lifting the clown's purse and exits.

The scene that follows focuses on the sheep-shearing feast. Florizel and Perdita flounder in an awkward courtship. Florizel praises Perdita's qualifications as the chosen "queen" of this spring ritual. But aware of Florizel's being a true prince, and the unreality of her title as "queen," Perdita is unhappy. She cautions Florizel about the potential wrath that a liaison between them might arouse in his father. Florizel urges her to remember some of the mythical transformations that love has caused.

As Perdita again urges the prince to be realistic, he swears to honour his love for her above all other things. He then commands her to exhibit cheer for her approaching "guests."

Perdita's "father," the shepherd, chides her for neglecting her duties as a "queen." Therefore, Perdita begins entertaining; first, she greets the disguised Polixenes and Camillo and hands out flowers to them. After the king and his adviser observe Perdita's prudent parries to Florizel's bold courtship, Polixenes observes a bearing and beauty in Perdita that transcend her supposedly low station. Camillo affirms these unusual qualities. The clown moves the festival into action by calling for music and dance, and again, Polixenes remarks upon Perdita's grace. The shepherd says that the young couple love each other and hints that "Doricles" (Florizel's pseudonym) will discover an unsuspected dowry if he proposes to Perdita.

The entertainment continues with a dance of twelve satyrs performed by a group of uninvited amateurs, but throughout these dances, Polixenes observes Florizel and Perdita. Deciding that it is time to part the couple, the king calls Florizel over to ask why he did not bring presents to enliven his romance. The love-struck prince declares that Perdita does not care for such trifles; she wants only gifts that are locked in his heart.

When Florizel declares that no power or wealth could seem worthwhile without Perdita's love, Polixenes and Camillo support the sentiment. The shepherd then asks his daughter if she feels the same way. She says that she does but cannot express it as well.

The shepherd declares the betrothal of the young couple, with the two strangers as witnesses. The disguised Polixenes urges Florizel to consult his father before making such an important decision, but Florizel impetuously and repeatedly refuses. Enraged, Polixenes casts off his disguise and threatens to punish all who participated in the betrothal without consulting him.

Perdita sighs that she was afraid something like this would happen. She urges Florizel to make up with his father and never return to her. The shepherd, in great confusion and despair, berates the young people for the ruin and the wretched death that they have probably condemned him to. But Florizel stubbornly clings to Perdita and tells his father to go ahead and disinherit him.

When Florizel decides to take Perdita and flee in a ship anchored nearby, Camillo stops him, advising him to make peace with his father. Then Camillo begins laying a plot to try and eventually return to Sicilia himself.

Camillo convinces Florizel to marry Perdita so he can present himself with his new bride to Leontes in Sicilia. He predicts that Leontes will welcome the opportunity to be the host for the son of the long-separated "brother," since Polixenes will not respond to Leontes' invitation to end their old quarrel. Florizel agrees that this plan seems preferable to wandering forever as unwelcome strangers in strange lands. Camillo then offers funds from his wealth in Sicilia to properly outfit the royal party.

Act V is set again in Sicilia. Leontes is seemingly much the same man as he was when we last saw him sixteen years before. He is conversing with Paulina and the two lords who brought the message from Delphos, Cleomenes and Dion. Cleomenes is urging Leontes to forget and forgive his evil "as the heavens have done." But Leontes says that as long as he can remember those whom he lost, especially Hermione, he cannot forget his errors.

Paulina, we see, is still feeding Leontes' guilt. Cleomenes and Dion ask Paulina to "stop salting the wounds." She retorts that their wish for the king to heal so that he can marry again counters Apollo's oracle "that King Leontes shall not have an heir/ Till his lost child be found," an event as unlikely as the return of her own husband, Antigonus. She tells Leontes not to wish for an heir.

Leontes encourages Paulina to continue to remind him of Hermione's superior virtues; he believes that taking any other wife would end in disaster. Paulina extracts an oath from Leontes, in the presence of the two witnesses, that he will not marry until Paulina approves. Paulina states that such a time will come only when Hermione is recreated.

A servant enters then to announce the arrival of Prince Florizel and his wife, whom he describes as a woman unsurpassed in beauty and virtue. Leontes cleverly perceives that Florizel's small group of attendants means that this visit is "forced." It is not an official visit, at all. Paulina notes the servant's excessive praise of Florizel's wife. She chides him for such praise when he has written verses that have stated that Hermione could never be equaled. The servant, however, maintains that all will agree with him after they have seen Perdita.

Leontes is thrown into a miserable reminiscence when he sees the young couple. They remind him of his loss of friendship with Polixenes. Florizel claims that his father sent him to reinstate that old friendship; Polixenes, he says, is too infirm to make the trip himself, and he then relates an imaginary tale about his strange arrival. He says that he has arrived from Libya, where he acquired Perdita. He explains the small group that accompanies him by saying that he sent the larger group to Bohemia to report his success to his father. He then requests that Leontes remember his own youthful love as good reason to petition Polixenes' acceptance of Perdita. Leontes, reminded of his love for Hermione, promises to speak for the young couple.

In the next scene, Autolycus questions some gentlemen who possess important news from the court of Leontes. The stories are pieced together to reveal that Leontes now knows that Perdita is his daughter and that he can finally celebrate the return of his lost heir.

Because of Perdita's request to see the lifelike statue of her mother, a celebration dinner has been organized near the statue.

The final scene at Hermione's statue is the setting for the play's "renewal." When they first enter, Leontes is suffering, but Perdita steadfastly stares at the lifelike statue. Paulina then amazes them all by commanding the statue to move. At last, Hermione speaks, and everyone learns that she has remained alive (but hidden) all these sixteen years. As they all exit to enjoy their new happiness, Leontes ends Paulina's loneliness by choosing the good Camillo to be her husband.

ABOUT *THE WINTER'S TALE*

No one seriously disputes Shakespeare's source for *The Winter's Tale*. Convincing internal evidence links his play to *Pandosto: The Triumph of Time*, a popular novel by Robert Greene, first published in 1588.

Shakespeare follows most of Greene's narrative for the first three acts of *The Winter's Tale*, but he changes the names of all the characters whom he adapted from Greene. Two favourite characters, Autolycus and the shepherd's son, are Shakespeare's creations, as are his radical changes in Acts IV and V. In such rural settings as the sheep-shearing scene in Act IV, Shakespeare adds to Greene's less developed pastoral theme, and in Act V, Shakespeare restructures Greene's ending to achieve a more satisfactory romantic conclusion. According to most critics, Shakespeare's play was probably written during the years 1610–11. One certain date is a performance recorded on May 15, 1611.

As a play written at this late stage of Shakespeare's career, *The Winter's Tale* can be given two important classifications: it is more Jacobean than Elizabethan, and it is more Romance than Comedy, History, or Tragedy.

The Jacobean classification is actually a subclassification of the entire span of years that is commonly referred to as the Renaissance. The Jacobean period extends from 1603 (the year of Elizabeth's death) to 1642 (the year when the Puritans closed the theaters); the term is taken from the name of King James 1, who ruled from 1603–25 (Jacobus is the Latin form of the name James). Two key characteristics of the age are the widening (1) political and (2) religious splits between the Cavaliers and the Puritans,

a conflict that degenerated into Cromwell's takeover and led to dominant attitudes of realism and cynicism.

Perhaps this influence of realism and cynicism partially accounts for Shakespeare's altered vision in his final four plays. These plays, so difficult for critics to classify, are often referred to as the "problem plays." They are sometimes interpreted as a third step in Shakespeare's tragic cycle — an addition of the concept of renewal to the themes of prosperity and destruction which Shakespeare explored in his tragedies. According to this interpretation, in *The Winter's Tale* Shakespeare reveals King Leontes' destruction of his happiness when Leontes confuses his jealous imagination with reality; then the playwright finally reconstructs the family and the happiness of Leontes, after Leontes has passed a sufficient number of years in sincere repentance.

The four plays in this group of "problem plays" are *Pericles, Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest.* Two centuries ago, these plays were variously classified as either a history, a comedy, or a tragedy. The ambiguous label "tragic-comedy" might also apply to this group because some of their shared characteristics are: happy endings, which might be described as revelations; elements of the supernatural, combined with Christian resurrection; themes of sin, expiation, and redemption; and father-daughter pairings in which the daughter precipitates reconstruction after the breakdown of family unity.

In *The Winter's Tale*, the daughter, Perdita, certainly symbolizes spring and renewal throughout the play, and her mother, Hermione, is "resurrected" from a living death as a statue. Furthermore, this play shares with the other three a portrayal of love that transcends the unrealistic, total merriness of the comedies to a more realistic somberness that incorporates both natural mutability and the occasional sadnesses which love imposes.

Another genre that is identifiable in these plays is that of the pastoral romance, but they should not be confused with escapist literature; they contain serious lessons about virtue and vice. Yet they are not hampered by strict insistence upon verisimilitude. The plots are deliberately far-fetched, and the stories feature both the astounding and the incredible. Thus, Shakespeare's creation of "a seacoast" for Bohemia can be excused as perfectly suitable to the genre.

Other conventions of the Romance help explain events in *The Winter's Tale* that might otherwise strike the twentieth-century reader as being false or ridiculous. These conventions include mistaken identities, supernatural events, and ideal poetic justice and courtly settings, even among the lower classes. One might note also that the characters often act without concern for motivation; indeed, critics have raised serious questions about the apparent absence of motivation in these plays, especially after Shakespeare had developed psychological masterpieces in the tragedies that were written earlier. For that reason, it is important to determine whether or not the characters earn their happy endings or if the playwright merely grants them.

An important idea in these plays that has not changed from Shakespeare's earlier plays was the notion of the Order of the Universe, which he structured in accordance with popular Elizabethan beliefs. One image used to represent this view of Order is the great Chain of Being. In this Chain, each link represents some single thing in Creation. All things were linked, beginning with the foot of God's throne and ending with the humblest inanimate object. Together, they all formed a unity of the

Universe with an order determined by God. The top three links represented God, the Angels, and Mankind. But as high as they are on the Chain, the Angels and Mankind were not supposed to regulate or alter the Order. Instead, the Order of the Heavens was supposed to be duplicated on Earth.
With this in mind, consider the impossibility of altering the ultimate role of Perdita (Leontes' lost daughter) in the Order that was determined by God. She is meant to live as royalty, even after she is raised by a rustic shepherd. Not surprisingly, she is credited by everyone with possessing the qualities of a queen. And in spite of his great powers, Leontes is not able, finally, to alter her destiny that is, to live and eventually to reign.

Leontes' power to exercise Free Will is an important part of the concept of the Order of the Universe. The belief that God granted the power of Free Will to Angels and to Man helps to explain the exceptions to the remarkable Order. Free Will was believed to be available, and it could be used incorrectly — to the detriment of the individual's responsibility to contribute to the orderly maintenance of the Universe. Leontes is a good example of this improper use of Free Will.

Another exception to this ordered structure was Fate, conceived of as being uncertain and subject to disorders in the Universe. The phenomena of these disorders were often represented by the Wheel of Fortune, horoscopes, and the stars. The turning wheel and the moving stars were believed to influence man's existence, with man frequently a helpless participant. Again, Free Will offered the means to challenge Fate, if anyone was willing to risk punishment by exercising it to challenge the operation of the Universe.

A key corollary to this orderly view of the Universe was the phenomenon often described as the Cosmic Dance. This Neo-Platonist concept embraced the Greek representation of creation as being like music; it viewed the operations of the universe as being akin to a perpetual dance to mystical music; the planets, the stars, and other living things were all dancing on individual paths and different levels, but coalescing finally in cosmic harmony. (The different levels corresponded to the Great Chain of Being.) Of particular interest for *The Winter’s Tale* are images of dancing seas and Perdita's "dance of nature."
Another image that is also significant is the dance of the body politic, suggested by the movement of the courtiers around Leontes and, later, the festival participants around Perdita.

CHARACTER LIST

LEONTES

The King of Sicilia, As noted by Polixenes at the beginning of the play, Leontes has everything that love, loyalty, family and power can provide until he is dominated by jealousy and tyranny. After he has caused those most dear to him to die and disappear, he repents for sixteen years until he is ready to be offered a second chance for happiness. When he is again given the opportunity for love and loyalty, he is ready to cultivate and encourage these qualities, because he now understands and appreciates their values.

MAMILLIUS

Young son of Leontes; Prince of Sicilia. At a young age, Mamillius is wrenched away from his mother and forbidden to see her again. The moody, precocious boy dies, presumably of a broken heart, before his mother's sexual fidelity and innocence is accepted by his father. Mamillius' death seems, to Leontes, to be a punishment by the gods and causes Leontes to realize that his persecution of his wife has been a horrible mistake.

CAMILLO

A lord of Sicilia with a natural inclination to be a valuable friend. After he decides to join Polixenes rather than kill him, Camillo becomes just as valuable an adviser to the Bohemian king as he had been to Leontes. He is also wise and skilled enough to reconcile the love between Polixenes and his son, Florizel, into a tapestry of reunion and reconciliation among all the surviving, original sufferers in the play.

ANTIGONUS

Another lord of Sicilia. He seems to be the most influential lord in Leontes' court after Camillo leaves. Unfortunately, he does not possess the necessary skills to counter the chaos and madness caused by Leontes' temporary tyranny. He cannot control his wife, Paulina, nor can he contrive a humane fate for the infant Perdita. He deserves sympathy, however, for trying his best and for placing Perdita in the right place at the right time for both survival and a return to the life for which she was born. Antigonus suffers more than circumstances justify, however, when he is chased and devoured by a bear.

CLEOMENES AND DION

Two more lords of Sicilia. Their most important role in the play is to fetch and deliver the oracle's message from Delphos.

POLIXENES

King of Bohemia and childhood friend of Leontes. When Leontes ends their friendship, Polixenes develops in a different and more wholesome way. But he has his own personal crisis, which involves the perfidy of his son, Florizel. Unlike Leontes, Polixenes seeks advice at the time that he seeks facts, and although Polixenes ignores advice at the climax of his crisis, his wise choice of an adviser and his absence of tyranny eventually contribute to the concluding reconciliation at the end of the play.

FLORIZEL

The son of Polixenes; Prince of Bohemia. A brash and high-spirited young man, he is willing to throw away all responsibilities, loyalty, and filial love in exchange for the chance to live with and love Perdita. Because he listens to Camillo and cares about Perdita, he is able to emerge from his

ardent, youthful fantasy without destroying anyone. But he is tempted by headstrong emotions, a key to his character that is, he is capable of being selfish and self-centered.

ARCHIDAMUS

A lord of Bohemia who plays no further role after he has described the barrenness of Bohemia in the opening scene.

OLD SHEPHERD

The shepherd who finds and raises Perdita. For some reason, he has no name. Although he does appropriate the gold that was left with his foundling "daughter," he otherwise seems to raise Perdita in a fair and nurturing atmosphere. For instance, no character is aware of any different treatment or attitude toward his "real" child and his "foster" child.

CLOWN

The son of the old shepherd also exists without a name. Identified only as the traditional clown role that he fills in the play, the character is developed enough to be a remarkable favourite for generations of audiences.

AUTOLYCUS

Another favourite character from this play. A rogue who had once served Prince Florizel, he lives and delights by his wits. He plays a minor but key role in the final reconciliation; and when the goodhearted clown promises to reward Autolycus, the groundwork is prepared for our feeling that rewarding the rogue is more just than punishing him for his earlier thievery.

A MARINER

He exists long enough to transport Perdita to Bohemia, regret his actions, and die in a storm.

HERMIONE

Queen of Sicilia; the wife of Leontes. Russian by birth, this character is an unbelievably pure combination of virtues, including a sufficiently patient optimism that sustains her through sixteen years while she hides and waits for the right moment to rejoin her repentant husband. She never utters a sigh or a word of remonstrance about the loss of her children or her freedom after she forgives Leontes.

PERDITA

The daughter of Leontes and Hermione; Princess of Sicilia; later, the wife of Florizel, and Princess of Bohemia. Without any environmental influence, she grows up with a quality of royalty being one of her most

innate traits and with an uncanny resemblance to her mother in behaviour as well as appearance. Her outstanding virtue is common sense, which Florizel needs from their union more than he ever seems to realize. This quality is also used effectively to bring authenticity to a character that would otherwise be only two-dimensional.

PAULINA

Wife, then widow of Antigonus. A loyal lady-in-waiting to Hermione, she voices the conscience of Leontes in an irritating and scolding tone. But she is unarguably diligent and, therefore, she deserves her final reward of marriage to the good Camillo.

EMILIA

Another attendant of Hermione.

MOPSA AND DORCAS

Two shepherdesses who dramatize the role models for young women of their social level; they fail to sway Perdita from her natural inclinations toward graciousness and gentility.

CHORUS

The Chorus makes a mid-plot appearance in order to provide an exposition of the interim of sixteen years.

STRUCTURE AND ABSURDITY IN THE *WINTER'S TALE*

It is easy to accuse Shakespeare of absurdity and shapelessness in The *Winter's Tale*, because, as a play, it shifts between genres (tragedy and comedy) and certain events are beyond reality. However, The *Winter's Tale* is a work of art, and a well-crafted one, with a strong, convincing narrative which develops logically from Leontes' irrational jealousy and rage to his impulsively imprisoning and banishing his wife and daughter to finally being reunited with them, having undergone a psychological or spiritual change whereby he calmly and patiently rediscovers his love for Hermione and re-joins his daughter after sixteen years.

In terms of form and shape, the play is structured into two very distinct halves. The settings of Sicilia and Bohemia, and the contrasts between them, divide the play generically: tragedy and comedy. While Sicilia represents Leontes' 'infected' mind, Bohemia is a place of comic relief and happiness. In the festival, Perdita is reminded by Florizel to 'apprehend nothing but jollity': this typifies the overall sentiment of Bohemia, which is in stark contrast to Sicilia, where there is nothing to celebrate and there exists a general feeling of negativity and accusation. Leontes calls his wife an 'adulteress' and 'a traitor' and generally exhibits a comportment most undignified, for example when he petulantly accuses Camillo 'you lie, you lie!' and then tells him 'I hate thee', again demonstrating an extremely indecorous manner for a king of such high

status. This structure, therefore, shows Shakespeare's experimentation with genre and form, which he achieves through a shaped and developed narrative.

Perhaps one of the most absurd stage directions in the play is Antigonus' final exit, 'pursued by a bear'. This sudden killing-off of a character might be argued as lazy or illogical on Shakespeare's part, and it certainly seems absurd and unusual. However, this striking moment signposts a dramatic shift in mood and genre. In terms of form and structure, this is a pivotal point in the play, marking an end to a period of darkness, jealousy and accusation, and the fresh beginning of a much more positive, warmer stage in the play. The 'bear' is emblematic, employed by Shakespeare as a symbol of fear, alluding to the 'sprites and goblins' of the tale Mamillius tells in Act Two Scene One, where he suggests 'a sad play's best for winter'. 'Bear' also nods towards Hermione's act of 'bear[ing]' a child: a child that causes anger for Leontes and sixteen years of suffering for Hermione.

Therefore, Antigonus' death, which leads-off this symbolic bear, represents the end of this fear, jealousy and negativity. Shakespeare cleverly manipulates his structure here: the Shepherd enters immediately afterwards, bringing comic relief and a tone of jollity and fun, which have been absent thus far. He discusses openly (presumably with the audience) the sexual misconduct, or 'some scape', which resulted in this 'pretty bairn' being here before him.

Another seemingly absurd moment in the play is the final scene, in which Hermione's 'statue' is revealed by Paulina and Leontes rediscovers his love for her. Nonetheless, Leontes' confusion regarding the statue's 'wrinkled' appearance serves as a reminder of Hermione's sheer patience. She has waited in silence for sixteen years for this moment of reconciliation and has, of course, aged in the process.

This is an important theme in the play, hence Paulina's apostrophising it in this final scene: 'O patience!' Shakespeare invests his three principle female character with this quality of patience, which contrasts with Leontes' impulsiveness, as perhaps first illustrated through his disjointed and exclamatory utterance, 'too hot, too hot'. The statue motif is, of course, a symbol of art itself, the boundaries of which Shakespeare is exploring in The *Winter's Tale*. Leontes is 'mocked by art' and is described by Paulina as 'transported' by it: Shakespeare suggests an almost magical quality to art here, which is developed by Paulina's fear of Leontes' accusing her of being 'assisted by wicked powers' and then justifying her 'spell' as 'lawful'. Looking at this in the wider context of the artifice of the play itself, references to 'an old tale' and 'draw the curtain' in this final moment draw attention to the fact that this is an artistic construction. Art is absurd; it is not reality. Therefore, under what obligation is Shakespeare to reflect reality in what is a highly self-conscious work of art?

Another main example of apparent absurdity in the play is coincidence: critics might argue that it is totally unrealistic how the Shepherd simply happens to be looking for his two lost sheep immediately after Antigonus' death, and so just happens to discover Perdita. Equally, the flight of Florizel's falcon across the Shepherd's farm is an unlikely coincidence, allowing Florizel and Perdita to meet. Firstly, dealing with the Shepherd's discovery of Perdita, his shocked response 'what have we here?' is almost comical in terms of timing and coincidence, as the baby

has been on her own there for no longer than approximately five or six seconds, before being discovered and protected again. Secondly, considering the first meeting between Florizel and Perdita, Florizel claims to 'bless the time' his 'good falcon' flew over the Shepherd's land. The verb 'bless' is suggestive of divine intervention, or providence. The final example of providence is Autolycus' bumping into the Clown: when he ironically claims to expect a place in God's 'book of virtue' after directing the Clown, the irony does, in fact, ring true, in the sense that Autolycus is employed as an instrument of fortune. He is selfishly motivated but, out of this selfishness, something good happens: in the words of the Shepherd, 'he was provided to do us good'. Therefore, all of these absurdities and coincidences do, in fact, work together to create a unified plot. It must be remembered that The *Winter's Tale* begins a tragedy but ends a comedy, so a positive ending is to be expected; this gradual unfolding of providence leads to the final reunion at the end of the play, which demonstrates a careful and conscious plot development on Shakespeare's part.

All well-structured plays reveal a gradual journey (be it a literal or a figurative one) of individual characters. The *Winter's Tale* is no exception: Leontes has changed over the sixteen years of guilt and imposed 'patience' upon him. In the final scene of the play, the entire register and semantic field of his speeches to Paulina about Hermione's statue directly contrast with his aggressive, 'diseased' characterisation in the play's beginning. For example, he describes Hermione's statue as displaying 'infancy and grace': this is interesting, as here he recognises the positive connotations of purity and innocence of 'infancy' and childhood, which he fails to see at the beginning of the play when he calls Perdita a 'bastard' and a 'brat'. Leontes has, ultimately, undergone a journey of character and has changed as a result of his self-inflicted experience. This is a much grounded, realistic message from Shakespeare about everyday domestic and family life: jealously and impulsiveness, as well as mistrusting those who are close to us, can be overwhelmingly destructive.

STUDY HELP ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. Romantic conventions appear in many sections of *The Winter's Tale*. Name three influences on events at the sheep-shearing feast. Identify Romantic conventions in relation to some settings in this play. Comment on any which might have damaged the ending of this play.
2. Is Leontes the same loving husband and friend at the end of this play as he was at the beginning? If not, why not?
3. How does Shakespeare use characterization to threaten, then save, the infant Perdita? Use quotations if they help.
4. Describe how Shakespeare sets up and resolves the basic problem in this play.
5. Identify at least three parallels between the main plot and the subplot in *The Winter's Tale*. Is the effect an enhancement or a redundancy?
6. How does Autolycus gather passengers into the boat which is sailing from Bohemia?
7. Identify the major conflict in *The Winter's Tale*. How is the conflict resolved?

8. How probable are the events in Act V?
9. Paulina has often been described as a character whose actions grow from motivation. What is her motivation? Is she likable?
10. Is it unrealistic to portray a man, like Leontes, who kills indiscriminately because of unjustifiable jealousy?

BLOCK III
CHARACTERISTICS OF SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

THE ELIZABETHAN AUDIENCE AND THEATRE

STRUCTURE

Introduction
Objectives
Elizabethan Audience and Theatre: Characteristics
Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
Summary
Key Words
Self-Assessment Questions and Exercises
Further Readings

INTRODUCTION

The Elizabethan theatre audiences attracted people from all classes- the upper- class nobility and the lower-class commoners. The popularity of the theater reached people from all walks of life. The Elizabethan general public (the Commoners) referred to as groundlings would pay 1 penny to stand in the 'Pit' of the Globe Theater. The gentry would pay to sit in the galleries often using cushions for comfort. Rich nobles could watch the play from a chair set on the side of the Globe stage itself. Theatre performances were held in the afternoon, because there was limited artificial lighting. Men and women attended plays, but often the prosperous women would wear a mask to disguise their identity. The plays were extremely popular and attracted vast audiences to the Elizabethan Theatres.

This unit sheds light on the features and characteristics of the Elizabethan audience and theatre.

OBJECTIVE

AFTER GOING THROUGH THIS UNIT, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO:

- Describe the characteristics of Elizabethan era
- Explain the features of Elizabethan theatre
- Discuss the characteristics of the Elizabethan audience

ELIZABETHAN AUDIENCE AND THEATRE: CHARACTERISTICS

The audience for which Shakespeare wrote his plays during the Elizabethan era was of an interesting mix. They were usually identified as both

vulgar and refined. The vulgar comprised of 'uncultured people' like those who belonged to the category of soldiers, thieves, sailors , robbers, petty criminals men and women involved in 'immoral' activities. On the other hand, refined audience referred to educated men and women, people holding respectable business and those in charge of public offices. People who were critics, scholars and of course the nobilities from the royal families were also part of this category. It was necessary to cater to the tastes of both the classes. Hence Shakespeare as well as other playwrights wrote in a manner that was acceptable to both the sections.

Some critics of Elizabethan period have pointed out that Shakespeare wrote for the 'great vulgar and the small' in his time, not for posterity. If Queen Elizabeth and the maids of honour laughed heartily at his worst jokes, and the catcalls in the gallery were silent at his best passages, he went home satisfied, and slept the next night well. He was willing to take advantage of the ignorance of the age in many things, and if his plays pleased others, not to quarrel with them himself.'

During the Elizabethan era theatre functioned as a medium of public amusement. That is why it instantly became popular. The first theater of London was created when Shakespeare was around a twelve years old boy. As scholars would agree, the theatrical world of Elizabethan period actually bloomed during Shakespeare's lifetime. The popularity of plays led to the establishment of both public as well as private playhouses. More than a hundred of companies came into existence during the time comprising of both amateur as well as lay men. This also resulted in complications associated with authorship as well as licensing of plays.

It will be of interest to know that the companies of actors resided in luxurious estates of Lord Oxford or Lord Buckingham etc. This was the time when most of the strolling troupes moved around the country performing anything that would create interest. Mostly these groups consisted of three or maximum four male members. The younger boys would play the role of women. They performed in gatherings and in open squares of the town. They also performed in the private halls of those who were noblemen or gentry. The licensing of plays caused a lot of troubles. Some not so effective performers who identified themselves as associates of some influential people actually came from dubious social backgrounds.

Under Elizabethan England the players were not allowed to perform political and religious subjects. There are documents suggesting that influential people from the country complaining about the growing number of actors and stage shows that were being performed. They were of the opinion that this place where more often than not indecent and even looked at religion in a disrespectful manner. The other problem was that, most of the people about whom there were complaints were people from the neighborhood and the performances gathered crowd. And with the crowd came numerous disease, and this became a matter of concern especially during the period of great plague. What needs to be mentioned here that, the theatre being a place for public to come together number of crime increased in and around the theatres. There are evidences suggesting that petty thieves and beggars flooded in these areas where the performances took place.

Queen right to curb all the social menace yet at the same time did not allow the disruption of the performances of the players. In 1576 she issued an ordinance with suggested that no performances will take place inside the city. But this was not followed seriously. The corporation of London was never in favour of the performances. But because the performance and drama enjoyed

favour from the nobility as well as the queen and that of the masses the corporation could not do much about it. Even though the players were restricted from performing within the city they could not be stopped from establishing themselves just across the river. This segment was outside the ambit of the corporation. This was a clear indication that the popularities of the plays would not die down any time soon.

Because of the immense popularity of the theatre, search restrictions only led to the growth of theatre companies and a healthy rivalry immersed between all the companies and actors. Soon enough the professional actor gained public respect and eventually were identified as significant members of the society. Theatrical companies gradually became association of men who were dependent on the favour extended by the Lords and Rich men. This helped them in bringing stability to the business while the company and the actors became part of established success which was very different from the life of the wanderers that they were once.

It is believed that sometimes the young noble man who came to watch the performance sat on the stage itself. After the first Globe Theatre was burnt down in the year 1613 it was rebuilt by King James with help of money from a nobleman. It was this rebuilt theatre which was used by Shakespeare in a letter part of his life. It is believed that during the winter period black friars where used in the City. According to historical documents, by the time the reign of Queen Elizabeth came to an end there were as many as 11 theatres in London both public and private. It is believed that a good number of people from the royal family got interested in the theatre and its performance leading to an unprecedented growth of theatre. The boys who performed at choirs and church we are also trained in acting. Thus, handing over the knowledge of performance to the next generation.

The authorship and ownership underwent a complex ritual during the Elizabethan period. A drama could be composed by someone and handed over to the manager of a company of actors. The company code performed the play with or without acknowledging the author. Sometimes an author never intended to consider the after effects of this decision. If changes were required to the existing play, then some of the popular playwrights would be asked to change it before the next production.

Henslowe, who had extreme interest in the performances invariably asked both established as well as a mature playwright to keep making changes and creating new content for his next production. Most of the dramatist of that period worked as apprentices. That is why they did not hesitate to do any kind of task that they were asked to. Many a times, an apprentice composes something and later on an experienced playwright fine tunes it to make it more stage appropriate.

Usually if a drama becomes popular, manager from the rival company would send his clerk who in turn will copy the lines in shorthand. There were many times when a Saturn play was reproduced with mutilated lines and scenes. Moreover, if one became extremely successful its length as well as scenes would be cut down so that they could be made more approachable and easy for the strolling players to perform. Despite its popularity and enjoying the patronage of nobility there still remain the Jungle stigma associated with the actors the playwright and anyone who was associated with theatre.

The Elizabethan theatre usually comprised of a large wooden platform which was used as a stage. It is believed that this platform was not permanent and could be moved from one place to another. The building usually had no roof. It was surrounded by galleries. This is mostly where the spectators for the

performance from. There was a yard build around the platform so that the " groundlings" could watch it. This year was created by mixing Ash with Canon or hales nut shells. The back of the platform consisted of a tiring house, but the actors would go and change their costume or put on their makeup. This segment of the theatre was covered by a roof. Theatre usually had a space behind the auditorium to accommodate the machinery that was required for performance on stage. Also, the raised platforms contender trapdoors which help the actors ascend or descend the stage.

"The Elizabethan audience was accustomed to lavish, magnificent costumes, though historical and national accuracy were almost completely ignored. Shakespeare likely had very little control over the actual selection of the costumes apart from the specifics he wrote into his plays, such as Shylock's "Jewish gabardine" or *Hamlet*'s "inky cloak"."

It is believed that costumes in particular created some controversy. It was a society where clothing was regulated by law. In the idea of putting up a cloth and pretending to belong to a different class, society or even gender, created a lot of controversy. Even through the majority of the audience was fairly accommodating to accept this kind of presence for a short period of time there was a small part Focus Group which thought this would lead to social unrest. But for the Elizabethan audience the costumes of the characters mattered more than the background for setting of the theatre.

It is believed that the audience of the Elizabethan era was more prone to believing every message that came through the ear. They did not show much interest towards visual discrepancy. Even the Elizabethan plays and drama played a major role in shaping the intellect of the period that it cannot be assumed that the audiences were of higher intellect. There are documents to suggest the nobility who came to watch the performances usually relaxed themselves without showing much engagement in the performance.

From today's perspective, we might feel that the Elizabethan audience was probably consisted of mostly well off people. But that was not the case. Majority of the Elizabethan audience were common people even though a healthy number of rich people were found in the spectator group. One could also find a good number of intellectual dramatists who would join the performance for its ability to convince them at an intellectual level. Even though it is not possible to construct the exact type of theatre cleared then, but it can be safely concluded that there were not many theatrical props available at that time to help create beautiful scenery for the settings. The Dramas were not very expensive during the Elizabethan period and hence audience from various classes could participate in viewing it.

The price was not regulated by who or what one was doing in terms of profession or how one was pleased in terms of social hierarchy. It was mostly based on the sitting arrangement. If the sitting arrangement was very comfortable the prices would be expensive, it was if it was not, then it would be cheap. The most inexpensive at meant one had to stand. This standing room was identified as the theatre pit. Majority of the theatre lovers without any hesitation kept standing there for hours together especially while watching a lengthy performance. During the period audience of all class watched Shakespeare's performances without any hesitation. It has been recorded that Queen herself attended the theatre of Shakespeare a number of times.

'The populace in Elizabeth's grade (e.g. gentry, knights, elected representatives) mostly likely paid the three-penny (or more) admission to get the best seat in the house, which meant the most comfort and finest location in the galleries. Two penny admissions were most likely paid by citizens in the

upper middle class like artisans or other actors. They were seated just like the wealthy, but the best places were not reserved for them. Also, both of these admissions prices provided a canopy from different weather conditions'.

The Elizabethan audience wanted to watch theatre because of number of reasons. For them the public playhouses were centers of learning. Still the audience was primarily composed of people who lacked sophistication the only place they could go for if they are looking for entertainment as well as imagination was heading to a playhouse. It was an era where people did not have access to newspaper or magazine. There was hardly any culture of novels or cheat book. Theatre was the place where people could feel in their imagination and sensation with stories. This was a place where people could expose themselves to education as well as other cultural opportunities.

At times, the performances continued from dawn to dusk. It could be warm or cold weather, but people stayed and watched the performance. Since it was an Era when the artificial lightning and its culture was not very common people had to take recourse to the natural light to convey their stories. Even though many well the people went to amphitheater to see the performances, royalty like Queen Elizabeth 1 would never visit amphitheater to watch the performance. For the Queen, normal private performances were arranged. It is believed that along with the Queen close family members or extended family members would be invited to participate in this performance. These performances would take place in some special MP theatre which was not usually used by the local public. Many people in the amphitheater usually liked to wear mask. Usually women would visit his FB theatre and hide their identity behind a mask. It is usually believed that Shakespeare's theatre was most successful because of the kind of life as well as education history provided by the plays.

The widespread rise of nationalism that took place because of English winning over the Spanish Armada provided the dramatist a chance to use historical material. And for the next close to two decades from that time of victory over the Armada till the death of Queen Elizabeth stage plays revolved around historical element. Soon this familiarity with history became a cultural hallmark for all the theatres surviving in London. The dramatists did not hesitate to refine and cultivate the powers of the audience whenever they were offered an opportunity to do so. The ignorant spectators never hesitated in taking an interest in any new information that was provided to them through the theatre. That is how they managed to gather information from the theatrical performances about law history and perspectives of the playwright.

The audience in general was used to hearing the word and understanding the performances. They even did not hesitate to appreciate the monologues and debate that the characters carried out on stage. To a great extent or Elizabethan audience was used to the earlier morality plays. But it did not take them long to get used to the new acting pattern where words and performances were equally important. The new poetry sensitized the audience and the great actors fed to their imagination. It is believed that Shakespeare and his contemporaries were very lucky to have an audience which was attentive alert as well as equal to understand and believe in the new format of storytelling. They were definitely eager to know more about the secular variety of storytelling and it filled them with excitement while keeping them all through inclined towards stage performances.

The number of people who came to watch the performance was extremely high. It is believed that at times more than 5 or 6 theatres would perform every day for an entire week and sometimes for weeks together. This

is remarkable because we are also aware that a large population did not approve of this kind of playhouses and performance theatres. Also, this was an era where women would not be publicly allowed to go and participate in spectator ship.

Usually the theatres would consist of only one door through which the audience could come in after paying the admission fees. Announcements were made to inform the audience about the beginning of the performance. The gathered audience would be busy playing cards smoking, eating, or drinking while they kept waiting for the performance to begin. Pickpockets were extremely frequent. In fact, disturbances were such a problem that one would experience rioting as well. It is believed that behind Shakespeare's ability to be a great writer was the contribution of his audience. Then She had to cater to a large segment of the audience forced him to diversify talent imagination and creative ability. Elizabethan drama plays a significant role in shaping the taste of the audience while contributing to the growth of drama in general in English. Drama thus occupied a significant role in the lives of the audience and helps them shape as listeners and readers.

It would not be wrong to say that theatre enjoyed extreme popularity during the era of Elizabethan rule. There are no official statistics that would confirm the level of popularity though. The closing down of the theatres in the year 1642 after the Puritan revolution, clearly indicates that drama as a form was extremely popular in the period and it did threaten the authorities with its popularity. It probably indicated that there was the chance of drama influencing people resulting in them questioning the existing moral order and hence created a social disturbance.

ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The popularity of plays led to the establishment of both public as well as private playhouses.
2. The companies of actors resided in luxurious estates of Lord Oxford or Lord Buckingham.
3. It was a society where clothing regulated by law. The idea of putting up a cloth and pretending to belong to a different class, society, or even gender created a lot of controversy.
4. The price was not regulated by who or what one was doing in terms of profession or how one was pleased in terms of social hierarchy. It was mostly based on the sitting arrangement.

SUMMARY

- The Elizabethan theatre audiences attracted people from all classes- the upper-class nobility and the lower-class commoners.
- The Elizabethan general public (the Commoners) referred to as groundlings would pay 1 penny to stand in the 'Pit' of the Globe Theatre.
- The audience for which Shakespeare wrote his plays during the Elizabethan era was of an interesting mix. They were usually identified as both vulgar and refined.
- The vulgar comprised of "uncultured people" like those who belonged to the category of soldiers, thieves, sailors, robbers, petty criminals, men and women involved in "immoral" activities.

- On the other hand, refined audience referred to educated men and women, people holding respectable business and those in charge of public offices.
- During the Elizabethan era, theatre functioned as medium of public amusement.
- The first theatre of London was created when Shakespeare was around twelve years old boy. As scholars would agree, the theatrical world of Elizabethan period actually bloomed during Shakespeare's lifetime.
- It will be of interest to know that the companies of actors resided in luxurious estates of Lord Oxford or Lord Buckingham etc.
- This was the time when most of the strolling troupes moved around the country performing anything that would create interest. Mostly these groups consisted of three or maximum four male members.
- Under the Elizabethan England the players were not allowed to perform on political and religious subjects.
- There are documents suggesting that influential people from the country complained about the growing number of actors and stage shows that were being performed.
- Because of the immense popularity of the theatre, search restrictions only led to the growth of movie theatre companies and a healthy rivalry immersed between all the companies and actors.
- Usually if a drama became popular, manager from the rival company would send his clerk who in turn will copy the lines in shorthand.
- The Elizabethan theatre usually comprised of a large wooden platform which was used as a stage. It is believed that this platform was not permanent and could be moved from one place to another.
- It is believed that costumes in particular created some controversy. It was a society where clothing regulated by law.
- The dramas were not very expensive during the Elizabethan period and hence audience from various classes could participate in viewing it.
- The price was not regulated by who or what one was doing in terms of profession or how one was pleased in terms of social hierarchy. It was mostly based on the sitting arrangement.
- The populace in Elizabeth's grade (e.g. gentry, knights, elected representatives) mostly likely paid the three-penny (or more) admission to get the best seat in the house, which meant the most comfort and finest location in the galleries.
- The widespread rise of nationalism that took place because of English winning over the Spanish Armada provided the dramatist a chance to use historical material.
- And for the next close to two decades from that time of victory over Armada till the death of Queen Elizabeth stage plays revolved around historical element.
- It would not be wrong to say that theatre enjoyed and extreme popularity during the era of Elizabethan rule.

KEY WORDS

- Puritan: It refers to a member of a group of English Protestants of the late 16th and 17th centuries who regarded the Reformation of the Church under Elizabeth I as incomplete and sought to simplify and regulate

forms of worship.

- Friar: It refers to a member of any of certain religious orders of men, especially the four mendicant orders (Augustinians, Carmelites, Dominicans, and Franciscans).
- Amphitheatre: It is (especially in Greek and Roman architecture) an open circular or oval building with a central space surrounded by tiers of seats for spectators, for the presentation of dramatic or sporting events.

SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISE

SHORT-ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Write a short-note on the features of Elizabethan theatre.
2. How were historical and political elements incorporated in the play? What was their significance?
3. What led to the close of theatre? What threatened its popularity during the Elizabethan era?

LONG-ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Describe the characteristics of Elizabethan era in detail. Use examples to substantiate your answer.
2. Discuss the characteristics of Elizabethan audience. What was the class division in the audience and how did it affect the price they played and where they sat during the play?

FURTHER READINGS

1. Wells, Stanley W. 2003. Shakespeare: For All Time. UK: Oxford University Press.
2. Traub, Valerie. 2016. The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment: Gender, Sexuality, and Race. UK: Oxford University Press
3. DK. 2015. The Shakespeare Book: Big Ideas Simply Explained. UK: Dorling Kindersley Ltd.
4. Bloom, Harold. 2009. Shakespeare’s Tragedies. US: Infobase Publishing.

UNIT -VIII
SHAKESPEARE'S – COMEDY

STRUCTURE

Introduction
Objectives
Shakespearean Comedy and its Features
Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
Summary
Key Words
Self-Assessment Questions and Exercises
Further Readings

INTRODUCTION

Comedy has always been disregarded as a form of literature. On the other hand, tragedy has many times been unnecessarily appreciated. For example, Aristotle says: "As for Comedy, it is (as has been observed) an imitation of men worse than the average; worse, however, not as regards any and every sort of fault, but only as regards one particular kind, the ridiculous, which is a species of the ugly. The ridiculous may be defined as a mistake or deformity not productive of pain or harm to others; the mask, for instance, that excites laughter, is something ugly and distorted without causing pain." (Poetics) In this unit, you will study the features of Shakespearean comedy in detail.

OBJECTIVES

AFTER GOING THROUGH THIS UNIT, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO:

- Describe tragedy and comedy in detail
- Explain the features of Shakespearean comedy
- Discuss classical and romantic comedy in plays

SHAKESPEAREAN COMEDY AND ITS FEATURES

Aristotle's understanding of comedy as discussed above is undoubtedly short and appears to be only something mentioned in passing. Most of the major critics from the antiquity have spent their energy in trying to study tragedy. The reason was very simple. Tragedy after all dealt with problems which were deeper in nature while comedy dealt with things which were superficial in life. Of course, this is only a limited understanding of the genre of comedy. Over the ages, comedy has always attained its meaning in context to the place and time in which it is produced. At times comedies are produced to provide entertainment while at other times through comedies wisdom is celebrated. If we consider the writings of Aristophanes, we realize that most of his compositions were meant to satirize the contemporary society. Even Plautus and Terence too composed comedies to highlight the follies and vices of the people around them. On the other hand, we have George Bernard Shaw whose comedies were all about ideas and reading them make one feel wiser and better.

In context to literary creation, Polonius had once mentioned: 'neither a

lender nor a borrower be'. But Shakespeare did not believe in this world view. Shakespeare generally borrowed as well as allowed others to lend from his creativity. About the comic ideas of his contemporaries as well as producers depended on how one wanted his ideas to get shared with the contemporary audience. His uniqueness of style made Dr. Johnson mention in his work that Shakespeare's "tragedy seems to be skill, his comedy instinct."

Shakespeare never portrayed ugly or ridiculous as the major plot of his comedy. He denounced the classical parameters of comedy and introduced unheard of new elements. Both Moliere and Ben Johnson incorporated folly into their comedy. They were interested in reforming the society while pointing out the mistakes. For them comedy was a platform to convey the world that bad things must not be valued much. George Meredith, who is the popular believer in the power of comedy as social sanitizer finds it amusing that Shakespeare's comedies cannot be easily brought down to a single formula.

According to him, 'Shakespeare is a well-spring of characters which are saturated with the comic spirit; with more of what we call lifeblood than is to be found anywhere out of Shakespeare: and they are of this world, but they are of this world enlarged to our embrace by imagination, and by great poetic imagination.' As we read Shakespeare, we understand that Shakespeare's comedies are limitless in nature: they are poetic, they are lyrical, they are in conflict with the existing parameters of comedy and they are rare. It must be mentioned that, Shakespeare was not being extremely original. He was to a great extent influenced by his contemporaries like – Lyly, Greene, Lodge, Peele. Many critics have pointed out how the world of Shakespeare has a striking resemblance to the comedy settings of Lyly. Of course, Shakespeare would have been a path breaker or a trend setter, had Lyly not been his predecessor. Apart from being generally influenced by Lyly, scholars have pointed out more than 50 instances where Shakespeare has borrowed from Lyly. Again, even though Lyly's influence on Shakespeare was obvious, there is no denial that Greene had a greater influence on him as a writer. The adorable women who appear in Greene's writings also find a way in the idealized women that Shakespeare mentioned of in his plays.

Going through his earlier comedies, one can identify the distinct classical influence. Even though he was briefly acquainted with Latin and Greek, yet he was definitely familiar with the works of Plautus and Terence. These two authors very extremely popular during the Elizabethan England.

One of the most distinct feature of Shakespeare's comedies especially of the earlier phase was the distinct influence of the classical writing. By now us all know that the Comedy of Errors was influenced by Amphitruo. Shakespeare managed to change the Latin works into something more exciting through his power of imagination. Without a doubt 'The Taming of the Shrew is much better than its original influence. The Two Gentlemen of Verona is one of the best examples of Shakespeare's craftsmanship as a playwright. This is the first time that Shakespeare steps into the world of romance and make believe. H. B. Charlton believes that The Two Gentlemen of Verona is not a comedy but a romance. And that is precisely why the characters in the play do not resemble the people from the real world. Again, if we consider a play like *Love's Labour's Lost* we realize that it is Import of wit and has nothing to do with romance at all. The character who appear in the play are extremely sophisticated and witty something that the readers can come across in the plays of Sheraton and Congreve.

One of the salient aspects of Shakespearean comedies is that William Shakespeare's comedies more often than not end in marriages. In a general

scenario, marriages symbolize the assimilation of happiness, prospect of a beautiful future and the consolidation of the blood line. For Shakespeare the symbol of marriage is so integral and significant that at times we witness more than one marriage taking place by the end of the play.

A quick recap of *Twelfth Night* will show that there were three marriages by the end of the play. And the same happens in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In the final segments (Act V) of *As You Like It* we come across 'High wedlock' celebrating four marriages. In each of the play, the couples find happiness after going through a series of misunderstandings. Of course, critics cite examples from *Much ado about Nothing* and *Measure for Measure* to suggest that some marriages are designed to suit the purpose and doesn't appear to be a natural extension of love.

As already mentioned, misconceptions play a pivotal role in Shakespearean comedies. Numerous confusing and complicated situations appear in the lives of the lovers paving way for numerous funny and humorous situations. The friends of Benedick who seemed to play the devil between Beatrice and Benedick are finally the ones who bring the lovers together. Their trick helps the audience as well as Benedick to realize that Beatrice's rudeness was actually her concealed affection. In a similar fashion, Beatrice's friends also make fun of her feelings, but this only brings both the characters closer and helps them grow in path of love. But these interplay of confusion feels amusing because we (audience) are aware of the fact that the ending will be a happy one.

Shakespeare's comedies usually rely on simple misunderstandings as well as harmless deceptions. The dramatic irony that penetrates into the text because of these confusions gives an extra edge to the audience to identify the real nature of the characters. One of the most striking examples is *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The endless magic that the love potion creates is not just humorous through the series of problems it creates but is also crucial in finding true love. The forest which turned into the encomium of chaos and transgression eventually turns into the refuge where the lovers reunite, and their love is solemnized through marriage.

Another unique source of comedy for Shakespeare was introducing cross dressed characters into the narrative. *Twelfth Night* had Viola disguised as Cesario, had Olivia falling for her which creates ripples of confusion. But with each mistake committed the characters come on their own and learn something new about life and living. In *As You Like It* we have Orlando's staged wooing of Rosalind. But what made all these cross-dressing episodes even believable and interesting was that during Shakespeare's time women characters were played by young men, thus switching of sexualities was both acceptable for the actors as well as audience.

The vague settings too help in building the momentum for a harmless commotion and then making people fall in love. When the story unfolds in an uncertain date in Illyria people are puzzled. What makes this vagueness even more pronounced is the Italian looking Orsino's court being juxtaposed to English appearance of Olivia's household. Many of the Shakespearean comedies display his fondness for imaginary settings. One can witness the magical woods of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* while enjoying the Forest of Arden in *As You Like It*. The Merry Wives of Windsor without any distraction is set in England itself but we all not this one was created only to exploit the unprecedented success of Falstaff. Shakespeare somehow managed to include an indefinite space for comedies. During his time, it was common place to see the Comedy taking place in London while the tragedy is

taking place in Italy or France or Spain. Comedies were always closer to the English-speaking nations. We all know how Ben Johnson, had originally set Every Man in His honour (1598) in Italy. But it soon changes the settings to London to incorporate the demands of the contemporary times. Later on, he made London, the centre of his works as reflected in The Alchemist and Bartholomew fair. This obsession with setting London as the city of the many adventures created an entire genre of literature called "city comedy".

Historical comedy has always been considered to be of lesser significance than tragedy or history. That is why many of Shakespeare's contemporaries tried to incorporate satire in their plays. Satire has always enjoyed a better command in terms of literary acceptance then comedies. Even classical authors approved of satires than that of comedies. The whole genre paucity comedies had a purpose to them. They were meant to highlight the follies and vices that the contemporary world was involved in.

Shakespeare was not interested in the typical form of satire. But given that even comedy did not have too restricted an approach in his time he had the liberty of experimenting with his comedies. For example, let us consider the quarto edition of Love's Labour's Lost. The play is identified as 'A Pleasant Conceited Comedy'. Again, the quarto edition of the Taming of the Shrew calls it a witty and pleasant comedy'. While if we take a note of the title page of *The Merchant of Venice* we get to see that it is called as 'The most excellent Histories of *The Merchant of Venice*'. It is believed that this title pages where actually composed by the bookseller and not by the playwrights themselves. This was probably intended more as a marketing trick to help audience identify or make the book seller sell the book to a specific audience by playing around with the words. In today's time we consider The Taming of the Shrew as a text about sexual politics. On the other hand the title page of the first quarto clearly seems to acknowledge that the play was wittier and probably had nothing to do with sexual politics.

The segment of tragicomedy owes its existence to Shakespeare. Shakespeare can be easily identified with four such plays that he composes during the later phase of his prolific journey: The *Winter's Tale*, The *Tempest*, Cymbeline and Pericles. Even though each of these plays ends with a marriage yet we all know that they are not the best examples where one gets the opportunity to laugh. Each of these plays highlight other forms of emotions like anger, bitterness, jealousy and violence. We also come across some deaths, atrope which is not expected to get reflected in a comedy. Critics insist on identifying them " romances" and not as comedies per se. But again, if we take a closer look at some of the earlier comedies by Shakespeare like Troilus and Cressida, *Measure for Measure,* All is Well that Ends Well etc. we can see a distinct sense of dark material looming and this in turn challenges our general notion of comedy.

A Midsummer Night's Dream is the ultimate romantic text. It is littered with the spirit of dream, it is a story about love, and it is a play where realism and supernaturalism are intertwined in such a way that it is difficult to identify one from the other. The various pairs of lovers that we come across fall in love because of mistaken identity while Puck plays the mischief monger.

During the period of earlier comedies Shakespeare was working as an apprentice. This was a time when he was still struggling to find his own voice and create an identity for himself. He was experimenting with the idea of love as we see in the Comedy of Errors and The Two Gentlemen of Verona. The heroes and heroines of the romantic comedies that were written by Shakespeare invariably met in a place that was definitely away from the real-life struggles and

disturbance. It probably was a make-believe world that was "a mixture of old England and Utopia". Probably the Comedy of Errors and *The Merchant of Venice* are the only exceptions where the audience is exposed to the harsh realities of life.

Romanticism in Shakespeare is significantly about remoteness and unfamiliarity. It is a created world that is illuminated by the imaginative powers of the author. By introducing an unfamiliar time and space Shakespeare successfully incorporated the idea of make believe where logic can be tweaked based on the requirement of the plot without causing any disturbance to the audience. This also helped Shakespeare to remove the audience from the realities of life. His romantic comedies without a doubt managed to blend realism and imagination.

Both the characters as well as the scenes in the play can be viewed as magic which has the ability to transform reality. The setting is definitely imaginative and has no historical element to it. Each one of them seems to be carved out of a beautiful fancy. Yet at the same time they are relatable despite their remoteness. One can identify the contemporary figures and uses of contemporary fashion sense in a play like *Love's Labour's Lost*. Thus, despite its fairy tale element the audience finds enough reason to feel associated with the performance that s/he is watching.

In the comedies of Shakespeare, it is usually the women who take the initiative. We find the hero strutting over the idea and following a tragic line of thought. In the comedies the hero usually turns out to be subordinate to the heroine. Ruskin believes that Shakespearean plays are devoid of any heroes. It is all about the female protagonists. *The Merchant of Venice* would be of no fun without Portia and *As You Like It* would have felt incomplete without Rosalind.

Many scholars insist that Shakespeare has emerged successfully from the school of life. He had a passion for observation and he laughed chronicling life as it was. According to him, women probably felt and little out of place especially in tragedies. But without a doubt he also understood that in everyday life a woman was the epicenter of the daily affairs. Joys and happiness always revolved around the women and she was someone whose right cannot be challenged.

The woman about whom Shakespeare writes, irrespective of whether they are the Queen of the kitchen maid, possess an intense womanliness about them. They all have achieved success in their lives and they worked hard to conquer their beloved for the sake of love. In the comedies the heroines are the balance characters. They are blessed with the power of imagination, intelligence, emotion and enterprise. They are inspiring figure and they are willing to make sacrifices for the sake of love. Some scholars believe that in a female character Shakespeare love story unite heart and brain in such a manner that they provide an unexpected equilibrium in the world of disturbance that we are part of.

If we compare the heroine from the tragedies with the heroines of the comedies, we can get to know that the female protagonist of the comedies is more powerful, enterprising and mature. Any representative heroine of the romantic comedy commands our respect and admiration because she loves to read the other characters from the fore front. These women are attractive and witty and rely on their actions to change the course of fate. Every time a situation of crisis emerges the heroes are found to be struggling with the situation the woman slowly and steadily creates a positive situation which is built around hope and happiness.

Romantic comedy is a happy mixture of romance and comedy. This is a world where problems and issues are not very intense, and the male and female protagonist usually lead a happy life. But in contrast to this romantic

world, the world of tragedy is about the harshness of life. It is a pastiche of high world of romance and low world of comedy. It is difficult to reduce or define a comedy by Shakespeare into some formula. As, it has been pointed out by many critics that the plots of Shakespearean comedies are defined by a number of things. His comedies are created from tragedy, comedy, and satire. But his satires are not bitter. He does not criticize the society or the individual. He does not laugh at the characters instead he laughs along with them. Unlike Ben Jonson, his contemporary, Shakespeare's satires were not intolerant. It was devoid of any kind of irony or bitterness or even cynicism. Shakespeare was filled with sympathy and humanity.

He uses the clowns and fools of his plays to achieve his purpose. The female protagonist and the fools work together to provide happiness in his make-believe world. We come across the professional fools like Touchstone, Feste and Moth. They are witty and sophisticated. They are aware of how to make fun of the world around them. Again, on the other hand, we have fools who are not so cultured like Dull, Gobbo, bottom et al. They are absolutely ignorant, and this becomes the epicenter of amusement for the audience. The audience is left to wonder as to what extent someone can be stupid enough. Touchstone is wise while Feste is vulgar. On the other hand, Dogberry is full of life.

Much ado about Nothing borders on tragedy. The lady, for no fault of her, turns into a victim. On the other hand, the presence of Dogberry and his witticism manages to marry comedy with realism. In Merchant of Venice, the main plot revolves around signing of a bond. *Merchant of Venice* many a times has been identified as a text which talks about tolerance. During the Elizabethan period Jews were extremely hated and were persecuted without reason. In the play Shylock is represented as a character that is dignified and represents suffering and injustice meted out at the Jewish community. In Merchant of Venice we see Venice and Belmont represent two different ideas. Venice becomes the symbol of reality and commerce, while Belmont is all about love and romance. The play is a perfect mixture of seriousness and happiness while keeping a balance between reality and romance. In *As You Like It* romance is incarnate. It is a play of adventure romance and restoration of moral order. Love is the leitmotif in the play. The play starts off on a note of bitterness hatred and discord. But the play come to an end with good overpowering evil and beauty nobility and love being brought back to life.

The *Twelfth Night* is a combination of romance and comedy. Shakespeare has played around with all kinds of love through all the characters that appear in the play. The Merry Wives of Windsor is a satire on romantic comedy. The only element of romance that one can find in the play is through Anne page.

On the other hand, we have the dark comedies on the problem like *Measure for Measure*, Troilus and Cressida, All's Well That Ends Well etc. where the world of happy comedies is questioned. These are not identified by love tolerance or sympathy which is the general characteristics of Shakespearean comedy. The plays identify that Shakespeare was no longer in love with the idea of love. Troilus and Cressida is about love and war. All's Well That Ends Well does not engage in a heroine who is saint like and *Measure for Measure* suggests that love can turn into lust especially in dark comedies.

ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Shakespeare's comedies are limitless in nature: they are poetic, they are lyrical, they are in conflict with the existing parameters of comedy and they are rare.
2. Shakespeare was greatly influenced by his contemporaries like – Lyly, Greene, Lodge and Peele.
3. In the comedies of Shakespeare, it is usually the women who takes the initiative. We find the hero strutting over the idea and following a tragic line of thought.
4. The *Twelfth Night* is a combination of romance and comedy. Shakespeare has played around with all kinds of love through all the characters that appear in the Play.

SUMMARY

- Comedy has always been disregarded as a form of literature. On the other hand, tragedy has many times been unnecessarily appreciated.
- The ridiculous may be defined as a mistake or deformity not productive of pain or harm to others; the mask, for instance, that excites laughter, is something ugly and distorted without causing pain.
- Tragedy after all dealt with problems which where deeper in nature while comedy is dealt with things which were superficial in life.
- At times comedies are produced to provide entertainment while at other times through comedies wisdom is celebrated. If we consider the writings of Aristophanes, we realize that most of his compositions were meant to satirize the contemporary society.
- In context to literary creation, Polonius had once mentioned: neither a lender nor a borrower be". But Shakespeare did not believe in this world view.
- As we read Shakespeare we understand that Shakespeare's comedies are limitless in nature: they are poetic, they are lyrical, they are in conflict with the existing parameters of comedy and they are rare.
- One of the most distinct feature of Shakespeare's comedies especially of the earlier phase was the distinct influence of the classical writing.
- The Comedy of Errors was influenced by Amphitruo. Shakespeare managed to change the Latin works into something more exciting through his power of imagination.
- One of the salient aspects of Shakespearean comedies is that William Shakespeare's comedies more often than not end in marriages.
- In a general scenario, marriages symbolises the assimilation of happiness, prospect of a beautiful future and the consolidation of the blood line.
- For Shakespeare the symbol of marriage is so integral and significant that at times we witness more than one marriage taking place by the end of the play.
- As already mentioned, misconceptions play a pivotal role in Shakespearean comedies. Numerous confusing and complicated situations appear in the lives of the lovers paving way for numerous funny and humorous situations.
- The dramatic irony that penetrates into the text because of these

confusions gives an extra edge to the audience to identify the real nature of the characters. One of the most striking examples is A Midsummer Night's Dream.

- Another unique source of comedy for Shakespeare was introducing cross dressed characters into the narrative.
- The vague settings too help in building the momentum for a harmless commotion and then making people fall in love.
- Historical comedy has always been considered to be of lesser significance than tragedy or history. That is why many of Shakespeare's contemporaries tried to incorporate satire in their plays.
- The segment of tragicomedy owes its existence to Shakespeare. Shakespeare can be easily identified with four such plays that he composes during the later phase of his prolific journey: The Winter's Tale, The *Tempest*, Cymbeline and Pericles.
- *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the ultimate romantic text. It is littered with the spirit of dream, it is a story about love, and it is a play where realism and supernaturalism are intertwined in such a way that it is difficult to identify one from the other.
- Romanticism in Shakespeare is significantly about remoteness and unfamiliarity. It is a created world that is illuminated by the imaginative powers of the author.
- By introducing an unfamiliar time and space Shakespeare successfully incorporated the idea of make believe where logic can be tweaked based on the requirement of the plot without causing any disturbance today internet of the audience.
- Romantic comedy is a happy mixture of romance and comedy. This is a world where problems and issues are not very intense, and the male and female protagonist usually led a happy life. But in contrast to this romantic world the world of comedy is about the harshness of life.
- *Much ado about Nothing* borders on tragedy. The lady, for no fault of her, turn into a victim.
- The *Twelfth Night* is a combination of romance and comedy.
- The Merry Wives of Windsor is a satire on romantic comedy. The only element of romance that one can find in the play is through Anne page.

KEY WORDS

- Supernaturalism: It is the belief in an otherworldly realm or reality that, in one way or another, is commonly associated with all forms of religion.
- Realism: It is the attitude or practice of accepting a situation as it is and being prepared to deal with it accordingly.
- Romanticism: It is a movement in the arts and literature that originated in the late 18th century, emphasizing inspiration, subjectivity, and the primacy of the individual.

SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

SHORT-ANSWER QUESTIONS

- Write a short note on Aristotle understands of comedy.
- Discuss the features of classical and romantic comedy.

- What kind of criticism do comedies receive?
- What are historical comedies?

LONG-ANSWER QUESTIONS

- Give a descriptive analysis of Shakespearean comedy. What were the major plots of Shakespeare's comedies? Give examples for your answer.
- Differentiate between Shakespearean tragedy and comedy. What is a tragicomedy?

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UNIT IX
SHAKESPEARE'S TRAGEDY

STRUCTURE

Introduction
Objectives
Shakespearean Tragedy and its Features
Answers to Check your Progress Questions
Summary
Key Words
Self-Assessment Questions and Exercises
Further Readings

INTRODUCTION

A play penned by Shakespeare himself, or a play written in the style of Shakespeare by a different author is known as a Shakespearean tragedy. Shakespearean tragedy has got its own specific features, which distinguish it from other kinds of tragedies. It must be kept in mind that Shakespeare is mostly influenced by Aristotle's theory of tragedy in his works. The elements of a Shakespearean tragedy are discussed in detail in this Unit. The word tragedy was derived from the Greek word tragoidia, which means 'the song of the goat.' It is called 'the song of the goat' because in ancient Greece the theatre performers used to wear goatskin costumes to represent satyrs. A Shakespearean tragedy is a specific type of tragedy (a written work with a sad ending where the hero either dies or ends up mentally, emotionally, or spiritually devastated beyond recovery) that also includes all of the additional elements which distinguishes it from usual tragedies.

OBJECTIVES

AFTER GOING THROUGH THIS UNIT, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO:

- Describe tragedies
- Discuss the features of Shakespearean tragedy
- Define a tragic hero

SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDY AND ITS FEATURES

Aristotle defines tragedy as, "the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately; in the parts of the work; in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotion." Scholars insist that this definition had influenced the neo classical dramatists of Europe to a great extent. Shakespearean tragedies are usually divided into four different segments: early tragedies, historical tragedies, major tragedies and Roman tragedies.

The early tragedies would comprise of Titus Andronicus and *Romeo and Juliet*. After the publication of Seneca's Ten Tragedies in the year 1581, it

greatly influenced playwrights of the Elizabethan period. Critics argue that if there were no Seneca the Elizabethan tragedies would have never have shaped up. The theme of blood and revenge, supernaturalism and madness became so popular that almost every other dramatist tried incorporating these themes into their writings. Titus Andronicus one of the earliest tragedies written by Shakespeare looks almost like a replica of a work composed by Seneca. Titus was the Roman general who lost most of his children in the battle that he fought against the Goths. He decides to avenge everything that has gone wrong with him. Even though in the first glance Titus looks like someone inspired by Seneca because of the celebration of blood and death yet at the same time there is no denial that Titus is one of those earlier characters of Shakespeare who distinctly displays an element of intense tragedy that is reflected in the later tragedies of Shakespeare.

Romeo and Juliet, there is a very little strain of Seneca. In fact, one of the most distinguishable features of *Romeo and Juliet* is that they do not possess any tragic flaw. They are the victims of the faith they are not victims of their own doing. The famous author Chaucer in his Monk's tale suggests that a tragedy is a story where we talk about someone of great instrument and he has fallen into misery and wretchedness. Analyzed from this perspective Richard definitely fits into the bill of a tragic king. He was somebody from an extremely influential position and later he was imprisoned and killed. He is one of those heroes from the major tragedies who are responsible for their own downfall. Richard is someone who is made to handle hostile circumstances. He is someone who tragic flaw revolved around him is being sentimental. Yet at the same time there is no tragic conflict.

If we consider *Richard II*I, we realize that Shakespeare was definitely under the influence of his contemporaries and predecessors like Marlowe and Machiavelli. This is probably the only text which has been off and on compared with *Macbeth*. But of course, *Macbeth* stands in a more superior position because he is a poet and he is caught by his ambition which is regulated by morality. Even when he is ready to occupy the throne after causing such unrest and feeling glad we cannot but admire him through the conflicting imagination that he was struggling with. Richard, on the other hand, is not a tragic hero like that of *Macbeth*. But at the same time, in the battle of Bosworth, his sufferings come out clearly through the tricks of conference that we come across. We see how the ghosts of the victims come to curse him. Interestingly, Richard is an antagonist who shows the distinct side of humanity.

Shakespearean tragedies albeit are not regulated by rules. In fact, Shakespeare has never won any inclination towards adherence of rules. His tragedies identify the evolution of a new form of tragedy. The tragedies produced by the Greeks were highly rhetorical as well as political. While for Shakespeare tragedy is mostly a mental conflict. It is more layered more complicated and along with the divine intervention it also talks about the human aspect. Greek tragedy also had a strong streak of religious undertone to it. But Shakespearean tragedies are more flesh and blood and secular. In *Romeo and Juliet* as well as in Antony and Cleopatra we find both the male and female protagonist are of equal significance.

The protagonists in Antony and Cleopatra are equally more active and on the other hand the hero and heroine of *Romeo and Juliet* are equally powerless. Even if we consider *Macbeth* we realize that the heroine who has surfaced as a powerful figure who has managed to suppress her womanhood is finally pushed into insanity and eventually death. It more often than not highlights the plight of the main character and the woman protagonist is invariably side-lined.

We cannot deny that in certain aspects, Shakespeare's tragedies resemble Greek tragedies. Aristotle in his Poetics talks about certain characteristics that a good tragic hero should possess. According to him, hero should be of greater magnitude than an ordinary man, but he should not be a man of complete virtues; yet he must possess elements of greatness. The hero must be someone of higher stature and his fate would somewhere impact the welfare of the entire nation. It is essential that the hero must enjoy a reputation and prosperity of such greatness that when fortune strikes him the world around him definitely gets affected. A situation like this will be responsible for evoking our pity and sympathy for this person. Even though at the broader level he has to resemble an ordinary man yet he is noble attitude and patient should make him larger than life only then would the audience idealize him.

If we consider Shakespeare's heroes from this light, we realize that most of his tragic heroes are of noble stature. After all Romeo is an aristocrat, Antony is an emperor, *Coriolanus* is a general, Brutus is a man of high position, *Richard II* is the king, Titus is a general etc. The heroes of Shakespearean tragedies are of such significance that they hold special place in the public domain. *Macbeth* is initially or general and Elevators himself to the position of the king. *Hamlet* is a prince who has been deprived of his Throne. *King Lear* is a king was wrong decision collapses the functioning of the kingdom. They are all great people who suffer from fatal flaws.

All the heroes of the major tragedies are people who have lost any hope in life or are in the brink of leaving this world existence. *Macbeth* is someone who degenerated himself over the years, *King Lear* is someone who is extremely elderly, and Ortho has seen decline in his existence. Even though *Hamlet* is still in his 20s he is someone who is completely sick of life. It is this profound melancholy as well as bloom that surround these four heroes which makes them the best tragic example. The inherent weakness that is ingrained in every Shakespearean tragic Hero makes them even a great character while making them appear as quintessential human.

In Shakespeare, the protagonists are responsible for their own downfall. They participate in their own doom. Each of the tragedies is actually a sequence of errors which finally culminates into something extremely tragic. The Shakespearean tragic hero is without fail responsible for his own actions, but fate plays a major role, even though insignificant. That is why we can really say that Oedipus is different than *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* or *Othello* and Lear because his life was regulated by fate. Of course, there are critics who believe that Oedipus who was consumed by pride and that was his fatal flaw. Being someone who was part of the renaissance, Shakespeare undoubtedly believed that a man is a free agent and he has the right to make independent choices.

Othello falls into the trap played by Iago because he is unable to judge the situation properly. Lear's problem was also a problem of judgment. He was unable to identify the sincere Cordelia from the scheming and plotting daughters that he trusted. Shakespeare's idea of tragedy has evolved over the years and is not confined just to his characters. The actions revolve around the powers of mankind which are more often than not difficult to be dealt with and they fall prey to it.

Shakespeare was someone who knew how to keep the balance between destiny and free will. Shakespeare weighs faith and responsibility in equal measure and realizes that both are equally important aspects of creating a great tragedy maintaining a certain balance between them and projecting faith and responsibility as complementary to one another. Of course, there are other critics who believed that most of Shakespearean plays are based on chance and

accident and less on fate. For example, if we consider *Othello*, we come across numerous instances that is invented by Iago to trap him and he willingly falls into it. Many critics believe that 'villains' in Shakespeare's plots do not hold much significance because the heroes eventually become victims of their own flaws and meet their end. After all Edmund and Iago (*King Lear* and *Othello*) only attack the beauty and good and rest is being because of misjudgment.

A Shakespearean hero is always torn between conflicts. This conflict is both internal as well as external. Like George Bernard Shaw says- no conflict no drama- we witness something similar shaping up in Shakespeare. The soul of the tragic hero is constantly struggling with its own self. If we take *Macbeth*, we see that the external conflict is between *Macbeth* himself and while the internal conflict is in his conscience. In a similar fashion, the conflict that takes place in *Hamlet* in the external space is with his relation to his uncle - Polonius, and also with Laertes. At the same time, the inner conflict takes place inside his own mind where is trying to handle desire for revenge, passion, ambition everything at the same time. In *Julius Caesar*, Brutus is subjected to conflict between his democratic ideals as well as his personal loyalty that he owes to his friend. Taking a look at Antony and Cleopatra, we will see that Antony is torn apart between Egypt and Rome which symbolizes love and duty.

The tragic heroes of Shakespeare are invariably solitary and lonely figures. They are usually devoid of friends; their near and dear ones cannot help them. No one usually has access to the conflict that goes on inside their minds. They suffer without being able to express and die, but at the same time. Despite their deaths, one never feels dejected or rejected in life because with that comes a bold affirmation that all the positive values will be restored again. In Shakespearean tragedy, the hero is not the only person who always dies. There are other people who die along with him. *Romeo and Juliet*, they both die. *Othello* and Desdemona leave this world. *Hamlet* and Ophelia, Brutus and Portia, Antony and Cleopatra, they all die. Death is inevitable in a Shakespearean tragedy. But the moral order is also being stored in a Shakespearean tragedy. The antagonist pays the penalty. Edmund, Goneril, Regan perish away, Iago dies. Cordelia's death is Lear's punishment. In Shakespearean tragedy the evil triumph's over the good for a short duration. In the end one can see the restoration of the moral order. That is why Shakespearean tragedy is never pessimistic.

ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Aristotle defines tragedy as, "the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately; in the parts of the work; in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotion."
2. The early tragedies comprise of Titus Andronicus and Romeo and Juliet.
3. Chaucer in his monk's tale suggests that a tragedy is a story where we talk about someone of great instrument and he has fallen into misery and wretchedness.
4. In Shakespearean tragedy, the protagonists are responsible for their own downfall.

SUMMARY

- A play penned by Shakespeare himself, or a play written in the style of Shakespeare by a different author is known as a Shakespearean tragedy.
- Aristotle defines tragedy as, "the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately; in the parts of the work; in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotion."
- Scholars insist that this definition had influenced the neo classical dramatists of Europe to a great extent.
- Shakespearean tragedies are usually divided into four different segments: early tragedies, historical tragedies, major tragedies and Roman tragedies.
- The early tragedies would comprise of Titus Andronicus and Romeo and Juliet.
- After the publication of Seneca's Ten Tragedies in the year 1581, it greatly playwrights of the Elizabethan period.
- The themes of blood and revenge, supernaturalism and madness became so popular that almost every other dramatist tried incorporating these themes into their writings.
- Titus Andronicus one of the earliest tragedies written by Shakespeare looks almost like a replica of a work composed by Seneca.
- Even though in the first glance Titus looks like someone inspired by Seneca because of the celebration of blood and death, yet at the same time, there is no denial that Titus is one of those earlier characters of Shakespeare who distinctly displays an element of intense tragedy that is reflected in the later tragedies of Shakespeare.
- If we consider *Romeo and Juliet*, there is a very little strain of Seneca. In fact, one of the most distinguishable feature of *Romeo and Juliet* is that they do not possess any tragic flaw.
- The famous author, Chaucer, in his Monk's tale suggest that a tragedy is a story where we talk about someone of great instrument and he has fallen into misery and wretchedness.
- If we consider *Richard II*I we realise that Shakespeare was definitely under the influence of his contemporaries and predecessors like Marlowe and Machiavelli. This is probably the only text which has been off and on compared with *Macbeth*.
- Shakespearean tragedies albeit are not regulated by rules. In fact, Shakespeare has never shown any inclination towards adherence of rules. His tragedies identify the evolution of a new form of tragedy.
- The tragedies produced by the Greeks were highly rhetorical as well as political.
- In *Romeo and Juliet* as well as in Antony and Cleopatra we find both the male and female protagonist are of equal significance.
- The protagonists in Antony and Cleopatra are equally more active and on the other hand the hero and heroine of *Romeo and Juliet* are equally powerless.
- Even if we consider *Macbeth* we realise that the heroine after surfacing

as a powerful figure who has managed to suppress her womanhood is finally pushed into insanity and eventually death.

- All the heroes of the major tragedies are people who have lost any hope in life or are at the brink of leaving this world existence.
- In Shakespearean tragedies, the protagonists are responsible for their own downfall. They participate in their own doom.
- The Shakespearean tragic hero is without fail responsible for his own actions, but fate plays a major role, even though insignificant. That is why we can really say that Oedipus is different than *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* or *Othello* and Lear because his life was regulated by fate.
- Of course, there are critics who believe that Oedipus who was consumed by pride and that was his fatal flaw.
- Shakespeare was someone who knew how to keep the balance between destiny and free will.
- Shakespeare weighs faith and responsibility in equal measure and realises that both are equally important aspects of creating a great tragedy maintaining a certain balance between them and projecting faith and responsibility as complementary to one another.
- A Shakespearean hero is always torn between conflicts. This conflict is both internal as well as external. Like George Bernard Shaw says- no conflict no drama- we witness something similar shaping up in Shakespeare.
- The tragic heroes of Shakespeare are invariably solitary and lonely figures. They are usually devoid of friends; their near and dear ones cannot help them.
- Death is inevitable in a Shakespearean tragedy. But the moral order is also being stored in a Shakespearean tragedy.

KEY WORDS

- Pessimistic: Someone tending to see the worst aspect of things or believe that the worst will happen.
- Restoration: It was the event in 1660 when Charles the Second became King of England, Scotland, and Ireland after a period when there had been no King or Queen.
- Melancholy: It is sadness that lasts for a long period of time, often without any obvious reason.

SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

SHORT-ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the characteristics of a tragic hero.
2. What is a tragedy? What were Aristotle's thoughts on the same?
3. How do the characters in Shakespearean tragedies justify their roles? Discuss.

LONG-ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the features of a Shakespearean tragedy in detail. How is it different from other tragedies? Give examples for your answer.
2. Draw a comparative study between various tragedies by Shakespeare.

FURTHER READINGS

1. Wells, Stanley W. 2003. Shakespeare: For All Time. UK: Oxford University Press.
2. Traub, Valerie. 2016. The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment: Gender, Sexuality, and Race. UK: Oxford University Press
3. DK. 2015. The Shakespeare Book: Big Ideas Simply Explained. UK: Dorling Kindersley Ltd.
4. Bloom, Harold. 2009. Shakespeare's Tragedies. US: Infobase Publishing

UNIT X
SHAKESPEARE'S HISTORICAL PLAYS

STRUCTURE

INTRODUCTION

In general, the term history play is identified with those plays (can be either tragedy or comedy) in which the action that takes the plot forward and the major themes that are included in the play are primarily political in nature. They might speak about an individual or the society, but politics takes the precedence. Even though Shakespeare himself did not classify his works as comedies or tragedies, in the First Folio (1623), the editors categorized the plays into Comedies, Histories and Tragedies. Of course, we come across some historical plays where the characteristics of tragedy or comedy are visible yet, they are not similar to the regular tragedies or comedies that we are used to seeing being performed. Many plays composed by Shakespeare are historical in nature. But only a handful are designated the title of "historical plays". For example, plays like *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, Antony and Cleopatra or *Hamlet* or *Coriolanus* are set in a certain period in history, but they are not categorized as histories because they do not have an overt political tone to them.

OBJECTIVES

AFTER GOING THROUGH THIS UNIT, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO:

- Discuss the trajectory of Shakespeare's historical plays
- Explain the characteristics of historical plays

THE HISTORY PLAYS BY SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare composed ten plays which revolved around English history. And he had written four plays which focused on Roman history. The Roman plays can loosely be identified under history plays, but for scholarly purposes we only consider those plays which narrate the political history of England as history plays. Needless to say, the history plays are derived from the morality plays which were popular during the early 16th centuries. Overall, the patriotic spirit which engulfed England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth (especially after the defeat of Spanish Armada) that brought down the threat of foreign invasion, gave rise to such form of drama. To add to the mood the

University Wits too started composing history plays thus making them more popular. It is believed that Shakespeare's professional rivalry with the University Wits like Marlowe, Greene, Lyly et al made him tread this field. These plays were popularly known as chronicle plays because they were based upon the English Chronicles produced by Raphael Holinshed et al. Most of the history plays written by Shakespeare are actually adaptations of Holinshed's Chronicles.

Shakespeare was known for borrowing heavily from his contemporaries as well as predecessors. It is argued that Holinshed's works were inspiration for both Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe. We all know that *Macbeth* and *King Lear* owe their origins to Holinshed and his Chronicles. But what might amuse the present-day audience is that Holinshed's works were not known to be historically accurate. In fact, the contemporary readers consumed it as fictional works. Critics love to identify both Holinshed and Shakespeare's writings as incidents based on historical events which were dramatized for recreational purposes.

THE FOLLOWING 10 PLAYS BY SHAKESPEARE ARE GENERALLY CLASSIFIED AS HISTORIES:

- *Henry IV, Part I*
- *Henry IV, Part II*
- *Henry V*
- *Henry VI, Part I*
- *Henry VI, Part II*
- *Henry VI, Part III*
- *Henry VIII*
- *King John*
- *Richard II*
- *Richard III*

The plays usually categorized as 'history' plays speak about English history roughly extends from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries. But a significant amount of focus is placed on the years between 1399 and 1485. Not surprisingly, each of the history play is named after the monarch who reigned during the period.

In chronological order we have King John appearing as the first play and Henry VIII as last one. But it must be mentioned here that Shakespeare did not compose the plays in that order. As we know, the plays create dramatic representation of five generations. Each of the generation of the medieval era seems to struggle with its own power structures. The plays depict the Hundred Years War with France and involve from Henry V to Joan of Arc while highlighting the Wars of the Roses. Before we discuss further, it must be reiterated that each of these plays are works of imagination. They are only loosely based on historical figures. William Shakespeare was a keen observer of the world around him and a took interest in history. The historical plays gave him the scope to explore the mind of the royal characters that he was dealing with. Such is the impact that in present times, we consider the historical figures in the way Shakespeare had portrayed them. Let us for example consider, *Richard II*I.

He is someone who is evil. He is kind of a psychopath in possession of a deformed body who holds a grudge against humanity. Of course, historians have done their bit to make us realize that this was not the case. But unfortunately, in the popular understanding *Richard II*I is what Shakespeare created. Henry V, or Prince Hal, is, the perfect model of kingship that we can look up to. After all he seems to have turned into a perfect human being after the misspent

youth. But this whole perspective is created by Shakespeare. Shakespeare's vision takes over reality to such an extent that we at times forget the whole history was re-narrated keeping in mind the way Shakespeare would like to unfold his future stories.

The history plays are insightful and entertaining. They highlight the political processes of medieval and renaissance politics. Yet, at the same time, they provide a deep knowledge of the glimpse of life that the society shared. Through the hays one gets an access to the royal court, tavern life, the nobility, beggars, brothels and everything in between. We come across one of the greatest English heroes, Henry V meeting face to face with Falstaff. It is just not the meeting alone; these scenes in themselves are entertaining while being profound at the same time

We all know that Shakespeare was living during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. She was the last monarch who represented the house of Tudor. Many scholars believe that Shakespeare's history plays are used as means to heighten Tudor propaganda. This was necessary because with the change of times, the monarchy was feeling the heat of the dangers from civil war. And plays were a great way to revive and celebrate the founders of the Tudor dynasty. Especially if we consider, *Richard II*I, we see the last member of the York is depicted as an evil monster.

A depiction of this nature has not been taken in a positive light by many modern historians because the usurper, Henry VII, is sketched in absolutely glowing terms. Again, one can clearly witness the political bias present in Henry VIII. This play ends with an effusive celebration marking the birth of Queen Elizabeth. But despite his leniency towards the Tudors, the plays are more about the decline of the medieval world and not exclusively about the royal family. In *Richard II*I we get a glimpse of how medieval world met its end with opportunism as well as Machiavellianism paving its way into the political life. Through a calculated evocation of the life of late MiddleAges, the plays underlined the benefits of the political and social evolution which had exposed the people to a better world.

The "history plays" written by Shakespeare are generally thought of as a distinct genre: they differ somewhat in tone, form and focus from his other plays (the "comedies," the "tragedies" and the "romances"). While many of Shakespeare's other plays are set in the historical past, and even treat similar themes such as kingship and revolution (for example, *Julius Caesar*, Antony and Cleopatra, *Hamlet*, or Cymbeline), the eight history plays have several things in common: they form a linked series, they are set in late medieval England, and they deal with the rise and fall of the House of Lancaster--what later historians often referred to as the "War of the Roses."

Shakespeare's most important history plays were written in two "series" of four plays. The first series, written near the start of his career (around 1589-1593), consists of Henry VI, Parts 1, 2 & 3, and *Richard II*I, and covers the fall of the Lancaster dynasty--that is, events in English history between about 1422 and 1485. The second series, written at the height of Shakespeare's powers (around 1595-1599), moves back in time to examine the rise of the Lancastrians, covering English history from about 1398 to 1420. This series consists of *Richard II*, *Henry IV*, Parts 1 & 2, and Henry V.

Although the events he writes about occurred some two centuries before his own time, Shakespeare expected his audience to be familiar with the characters and events he was describing. The battles among houses and

the rise and fall of kings were woven closely into the fabric of English culture and formed an integral part of the country's patriotic legends and national mythology. This might be compared to the way in which citizens of the United States are still aware of the events and figures surrounding the American Revolution, which occurred more than two centuries ago--although, like the English commoners of Shakespeare's time, most American do not know this history in great detail. Shakespearean history is thus often inaccurate in its details, but it reflects popular conceptions of history.

Shakespeare drew on a number of different sources in writing his history plays. His primary source for historical material, however, is generally agreed to be Raphael Holinshed's massive work, The Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland, published in 1586-7. Holinshed's account provides the chronology of events that Shakespeare reproduces, alters, compresses, or conveniently avoids--whichever serves his dramatic purposes best. However, Holinshed's work was only one of an entire genre of historical chronicles that were popular during Shakespeare's time. He may well have used many other sources as well; for *Richard II*, for example, more than seven primary sources have been suggested as having contributed to the work.

It is important to remember, when reading the history plays, the significance to this genre of what we might call the "shadows of history." One of the questions which preoccupy the characters in the history plays is whether or not the King of England is divinely appointed by the Lord. If so, then the overthrow or murder of a king is tantamount to blasphemy, and may cast a long shadow over the reign of the king who gains the throne through such nefarious means. This shadow, which manifests in the form of literal ghosts in plays like *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Richard II*I, also looms over *Richard II* and its sequels.

The murder of the former King *Richard II* at the end of *Richard II* will haunt King *Henry IV* for the rest of his life, and the curse can only be redeemed by his son, Henry V. Similarly, *Richard II* himself, in the play which bears his name, is haunted by a politically motivated murder: not of a king, but of his uncle, Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester. This death occurs long before the beginning of the play, but, as we will see, it haunts Richard, just as his own death will haunt the usurper who is responsible for it.

Being the great composer that he was, Shakespeare incorporated the Lancaster and the York myths into his plays. These myths were passed onto him from the chronicles he followed and the Tudor myths which were part of local legends. According to the 'Lancaster myth,' *Richard II* being overthrown from power and *Henry IV*'s occupying the reign was something which was sanctioned by providence. Moreover, Henry V's achievements were identified as divine favour. On the other hand, the 'York myth' considered Edward IV's dethroning of Henry VI as a restoration which was designed by the providence. This was necessary to handover the throne to the lawful heirs of *Richard II*.

Again, the 'Tudor myth' propagated by the historians as well as the poets alike who wrote after the accession of Henry VII identified Henry VI as a lawful king. In fact, they condemned the York brothers for taking his life. They also stressed how the Yorkist fall was all divine ordained. This finally led to the rise of Henry Tudor. He played a major role in uniting the houses of Lancaster and York. It was believed that the 'saintly' Henry VI had forecasted a union of this nature. It was wholeheartedly accepted that Henry Tudor's was justified in

deposing of *Richard III*.

Interestingly, the chroniclers like Edward Hall, Polypore Vergil, and Holinshed et al did not show why the Tudor regime was great. Instead they tried to bring focus on what is to be learnt from the mistakes. Through these narratives they tried to draw a similar analogy with their contemporary times so that they are not turning morally ambiguous. We see that Half in Union of the Two Noble and Illustrate Families of Lancaster and Yorke (1548) highlights how the almighty had exercised curse upon England for deposing as well as murdering *Richard II*, we also see God finally giving way and sending peace through the dynasty carried forward by Henry Tudor.

In his Divine Providence in the England of Shakespeare's Histories, H. A. Kelly discusses political biases that appear in contemporary chronicles, Elizabethan poetry as well as histories written by Tudors especially the 2 tetralogies composed by Shakespeare: Henry VI to *Richard III* and *Richard II* to Henry V. Shakespeare's greatest contribution as a dramatist with focus on history was eliminating the supposedly divine intervention narratives and sharing them as just opinions. The Lancaster myth is shattered by Lancaster. And the opposing myth is perpetuated by the Yorkists while the Tudor myth is symbolized by Henry Tudor.

We know that the chronicles decided to understand the events from the divine justice perspective. But Shakespeare does not accept this explanation. For example, the chronicles suggest that in his speech in Parliament Richard, Duke of York, emphasized on providential justice. But Shakespeare does not include this episode in the parliament scene that takes place in the beginning of Henry VI. This conscious elimination talks about absolute rejection of the idea.

We get to know that in the first tetralogy, *Henry VI*, at no point of time considers his troubles as an example of divine retribution. And by the time we reach the second tetralogy, there is hardly any evidence that longs for providential punishment of *Henry IV*. There are numerous allusions in the plays that talks about providential punishment which is hereditary in nature - *Richard II*'s prediction, *Henry IV*'s fear that his wayward son will punish him, Henry V's fear that he will be punished for the sins done by his father etc. As we move on, we realize that The Chronicles insist that God was not happy with the marriage of Henry VI to Margaret. It was coupled by the unfulfilled promises that he had extended to the Armagnac girl. But William Shakespeare introduces Duke Humphrey so that he can turn into obstacle and not let the marriage to Margaret take place because in that case Anjou and Maine will be in trouble. Instead of divine explanations, Shakespeare invariably explains situation and scenario through poetic justice. We come across curses, prophecies, dreams envelope the prophecies of Henry VI about Henry VII.

The history plays of Shakespeare create a new dramatic history that does not require any historical precedence. The plays consciously move away from the facts and introduce a new level of dramatic styles. In that way the place intentionally teases audiences' sense of knowledge and keeps them guessing as to what will happen next. The history that the Elizabethan audience came across in theatre through Shakespeare's works both new and unpredictable which was probably echoing the spirits of uncertainty that was prevalent in the contemporary time.

The histories written by William Shakespeare can be categorized into two major segments. The first tetralogy consists of three parts of Henry VI and *Richard III*. While the second tetralogy comprises of required to and the two parts of *Henry IV* as well as Henry V. Though on the surface level, this appears to be a harmless arrangement, but a deeper analysis will only highlight the

problem aspect of this arrangement. The second tetralogy which was written years after the first tetralogy actually narrates events that took place much before. So commonsensically that would imply, Shakespeare started work on first sequence of history plays and ended it with *Richard II*I. After that he decided to start oppressed sequence of history beginning with *Richard II.*

This kind of an arrangement also brings him to mind the thought that probably Shakespeare never intended to have the series completed. But the sequence of this plays also makes things problematic because they do not fit into the pattern. Edward III, King John and Henry VIII have hardly any connection with the tetralogies. Scholars have often insisted on treating each of the history plays as independent pieces. For example, let us consider, Richard of Gloucester, who is later identified as *Richard II*I appears to be completely different in *Richard II*I. Again, it is completely impossible to relate the unimpressive Henry V with the smart Hal who seems to be very witty. Even the two parts of *Henry IV* that appears to have been written together are actually so different from each other.

Jan Kott suggests that "every chapter opens and closes at the same point. In every one of these plays history turns full circle, returning to the point of departure These recurring and unchanging circles described by history are the successive kings' reigns". On the other hand, some critics insist that Kott's interpretation raises some pertinent questions. Somehow Kott's interpretation of history provides a very narrow perspective on the mechanism of history. Even though he speaks about the political struggle expressed in the drama, he does not manage to highlight the multiple aspects of history that gets reflected in the plays. Instead of that he turns each of the play into one single history ignoring the layered nuance that it provides. Knowles points out that Kott understands is largely the history. Phyllis Rackin suggests that the plays are an attempt 'in the context of Tudor historiography, in his theatre and in his world.' She insists that Shakespearean texts are designed as play scripts meant for performance which would have letter to a heterogeneous audience. It also made an attempt to restore the existing historical narrative while giving your voice to those voiceless who had not been heard in the official narrative.

The history plays of Shakespeare forms a complex intersexuality. It makes the audience recall the incidents then they are away from their history and legends and compare it with the existing historical place while understanding what is being offered to them through the Shakespearean performance. The histories that were composed by Shakespeare extremely dramatized form of the chronicles.

Shakespeare's histories are a dramatic interpretation of various forms of histories and the way it was created. After all a combination of all these plays give the audience a different perspective that was probably not accessible to them in the past. It is a combination of lies. The fact and fiction are two internal blood that not just the characters lie to themselves about what happened in the past, but we also come across figures from the history who are now dead (Margaret, *Henry IV* et al) who represent themselves in a different manner on stage. Their presence on stage (however ghostly it might be) unsettles the audiences' expectations. And it questions the audiences' understanding about the events that took place in the past and their inability to change while simultaneously blurring that time frame of the incidents.

In *Henry IV* (1), we see that the creation of history is an active process. It expects the audience to think like a historian. The play continuously compares and contrasts various aspects of the dramatic past and poses the question as to which one of them could be correct. It also makes the audience wonder if the

previously dramatized *Richard II* was actually a proper interpretation. Many critics insist that *Henry IV* (1) is probably the first historical play for Shakespeare where he is making the audience take part in the creation of history. History has been majorly rewritten in *Henry IV* part 1. We come across all the major characters who are cast in different ways to find their own place in history and redeem themselves from their past.

Interestingly *Henry IV* part 2 engages itself in talking about history that has been created on the basis of rumours and distorted understanding. The presence of honour in the induction part can be seen as Shakespeare's role as a dramatic narrator. In the induction we get to see how history is created from lies and an unconfirmed report which indirectly hints at the way the drama is going to unfold before the audience. Probably being unable to create a history in his own way, Henry decides to create an anti-narrative as the audience decides to understand his account of the situation. Shakespearean dramas make an effort to highlight the evolving nature of history the way it is created.

Needless to say, history itself becomes a problem for the historical plays. After all the actual nature of history, the existing facts always create an intense tension while creating a fictional account of the history. Oscillating somewhere between neither fact nor fiction, the historical plays seems to be in the lookout for a new history. The historical plays try to look at history as play itself while dramatizing the history and giving us a glimpse of how the people would have been engaged in creating that "history".

In general, drama and history share complex relationship. Drama is meant to narrate a story. It is a different form of art because it is supposed to be performed. Meanings are encoded not just in the speech but also in the movements of the actors who performs on stage. A dramatized history brings into light a form of 'history' that was probably never experienced by anyone before. We come across people from the past with different understanding and knowledge that might have performed in a similar manner in their 'real' lives.

Like most of his other popular works Shakespeare's historical plays are also based on works created by his predecessor. Some of the major works that has influence his place are: The Mirror for Magistrates (1559), Polydore Vergil's Anglica Historia (published in four distinct variations in 1512-13, 1534, 1546 and 1555), Hall's The Union of the two noble and illustre Families of Lancaster and York (1542, 1548 and 1550), Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland (1577, 1587), Daniel's The First Four Books of the Civil Wars (1595) and Sir Thomas More's History of King *Richard II*I (1543). Shakespeare generously adapts the not so authentic stories from The Chronicles and intertwined characters and understanding which are his own, thus inventing a new reality. Even though Shakespeare sources provides us with valuable ways to understand a text, without a doubt there always remains a comparison between the chronicle and drama. The new kind of history that he created give an opportunity to the audience to bring the non-existing historical figures closer to them while questioning about the understanding the head about the glorious history.

ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The history plays are derived from the Morality plays which were popular during the early 16th centuries.
2. Three plays by Shakespeare considered as history plays are Henry

IV, Part I, King John and *Richard II*.

3. The history plays are insightful and entertaining. They highlight about the political processes of Medieval and Renaissance politics.
4. The histories by Shakespeare can be categorized into two major segments. The first tetralogy consists of three parts of Henry VI and *Richard II*I. While the second tetralogy comprises of required to and the two parts of *Henry IV* as well as Henry V.

SUMMARY

- In general, the term history play is identified with those plays (can be either tragedy or comedy) in which the action that takes the plot forward and the major themes that are included in the play are primarily political in nature.
- Even though Shakespeare himself did not classify his works as comedies or tragedies, in the First Folio (1623), the editors categorized the plays into Comedies, Histories and Tragedies.
- Shakespeare composed ten plays which revolved around English history.
- And he had written four plays which focused on Roman history.
- Needless to say, the history plays are derived from the Morality plays which were popular during the early 16th centuries.
- Overall, the patriotic spirit which engulfed England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth (especially after the defeat of Spanish Armada) that brought down the threat of foreign invasion, gave rise to such form of drama.
- These plays were popularly known as chronicle plays because they were based upon the English Chronicles produced by Raphael Holinshed et al.
- Most of the history plays written by Shakespeare are actually adaptations of Holinshed's"Chronicles".
- The plays usually categorized as 'history' plays speak about English history roughly extends from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries. But a significant amount of focus is placed on the years between 1399-1485.
- The history plays are insightful and entertaining. They highlight about the political processes of medieval and renaissance politics. Yet at the same time, they provide a deep knowledge of the glimpse of life that the society shared.
- Many scholars believe that Shakespeare's history plays are used as means to heighten Tudor propaganda. This was necessary because with the change of times, the monarchy was feeling the heat of the dangers from civil war.
- In *Richard II*I we get a glimpse of how medieval world met its end with opportunism as well as Machiavellianism paving its way into the political life.
- Interestingly, the chroniclers like Edward Hall, Polydore Vergil, Holinshed et al did not show why Tudor regime was great. Instead they tried to bring focus on what is to be learnt from the mistakes.
- The history plays of Shakespeare create a new dramatic history that does not require any historical precedence. The plays consciously move away from the facts and introduce a new level of dramatic

styles.

- The history that the Elizabethan audience came across in theatre through Shakespeare's works both new and unpredictable which was probably echoing the spirits of uncertainty that was prevalent in the contemporary time.
- The histories written by William Shakespeare can be categorized into two major segments. The first tetralogy consists of three parts of Henry VI and *Richard II*I. While the second tetralogy comprises of required to and the two parts of *Henry IV* as well as Henry V.
- The second tetralogy which was written years after the first tetralogy actually narrates about events that took place much before.
- Jan Kott suggests that " every chapter opens and closes at the same point. In every one of these plays history turns full circle, returning to the point of departure. These recurring and unchanging circles described by history are the successive kings' reigns".
- The history plays of Shakespeare forms a complex intersexuality.
- It makes the audience recall the incidents then they are away from their history and legends and compare it with the existing historical place while understanding what is being offered to them through the Shakespearean performance.
- Needless to say, history itself becomes a problem for the historical plays.
- After all the actual nature of history, the existing facts always create an intense tension while creating a fictional account of the history.
- Oscillating somewhere between neither fact nor fiction, the historical plays seems to be in the lookout for a new history.
- The historical plays try to look at history as play itself while dramatizing the history and giving us a glimpse of how the people would have been engaged in creating that "history".

KEY WORDS

- Chronicle: It is a factual written account of important or historical events in the order of their occurrence.
- Tetralogy: It is a group of four related literary or operatic works.
- Adaptation: It refers to a film, television drama, or stage play that has been adapted from a written work

SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

SHORT-ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. What is the relationship between drama and history?
2. Give a brief description of the characteristics of Shakespeare's historical plays.
3. How is myth used by Shakespeare in his plays?

LONG-ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. What were Shakespeare's major sources of inspiration? In what sense did he draw upon the works of his influencers?
2. Shakespeare's histories are a dramatic interpretation of various forms

of histories and the way it was created. Critically analyse the statement and substantiate your answer with examples.

3. How are Shakespeare's histories categorized? Explain some of these plays in detail.

FURTHER READINGS

1. Wells, Stanley W. 2003. Shakespeare: For All Time. UK: Oxford University Press.
2. Traub, Valerie. 2016. The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment: Gender, Sexuality, and Race. UK: Oxford University Press
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BLOCK IV
CRITICAL REFLECTION ON SHAKESPEARE’S PLAYS

UNIT XI
DRAMATIC CRITICISM IN SHAKESPEARE'S TIME

The more fully informed we are about earlier theatres in other societies, however remote and alien, the more we discover exactly what expectations were shared by their audiences and met by theatre professionals then and now. This certainly includes the medieval antecedents of the Shakespearean theatre, for the mystery plays covered biblical history in a spirit of ultimate trust in divine providence reflected in the very title of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Even earlier the great Aristotle, precursor of so many later theorists, admitted in his Poetics that his preference for deeply depressing plays was not shared by his fellow Athenians. He preferred plays with a single plot about the downfall of one great man, and proceeded to prescribe in detail how that distressing kind of plot should be presented. His terms have been largely accepted by influential later critics like Sir Philip Sidney in his *Apologie for Poetrie*, and rigorously codified by successive neo-classicists who have tried for centuries to enforce their "rules" on theatre professionals with questionable success in many cases. Nevertheless Aristotle himself had to concede the existence of at least one alternative mode to his ideal:

> *Second in quality is the kind of plot some put first. I mean the plot having a double arrangement, like that of the Odyssey, and concluding in opposite ways for the good and the bad. It seems to be first in rank because of the weakness of the spectators. For the poets in their compositions follow the wishes of the audience. (Gilbert, 86-7)*

For Aristotle, theatre audiences are wrong and intellectuals like himself know better what artists should do. Not all scholars, critics and theatre professionals have agreed with him, including many known and imitated by Shakespeare. For example, in the sixteenth century, an Italian academic well-versed in Aristotle, called Giovambattista Giraldi Cinzio (usually identified as Cinthio in English studies of Shakespeare's sources) asserted the right of later authors to defy Aristotle's prescriptions: "To speak generally, authors who are judicious and skillful in composition should not so restrain their liberty within the bounds set by their predecessors that they dare not set foot outside the old paths" (269). Another even more orthodox Renaissance follower of Aristotle named Ludovico Castelvetro nevertheless accepts the artist's obligations to his modern audience:

> *Now, because poetry has been discovered, as I say, to delight and recreate the common people, it should have as its subject those things that can be understood by the common people and when*

understood can make them happy. These are the things that happen every day and that are spoken of among the people, and that resemble historical accounts and the latest reports about the world. (Gilbert, 308)

Cinthio was not only a critic but also a practitioner of the arts, and his theatrical practice confirms the opinions of the more narrowly academic Castelvetro about the "secondary" class of tragedy and its positive impact on audiences regretted by Aristotle:

I have composed some [tragedies] with happy endings, the Altile, the Selene, the Antivalomeni, and others merely as a concession to the spectators and to make the plays appear more pleasing on the stage, and that I may be more in conformity with the custom of our time. . . . And in this sort of play often for the greater satisfaction and better instruction of those who listen, they who are the cause of disturbing events, by which the persons of ordinary goodness in the drama have been afflicted, are made to die or suffer great ills. . . . It gives extraordinary pleasure to the spectator when he sees the astute trapped and deceived at the end of the drama, and the unjust and the wicked finally overthrown. (Gilbert, 256-7)

Shakespeare certainly knew and liked Cinthio's works, for his *Hecatommithi* (a collection of short stories) provided plots for *Measure for Measure* and *Othello*. So it is not surprising that Cinthio's positivist criteria for drama might apply generally to Shakespeare's plays, even to so negative a drama as *King Lear*, for all the evil characters in it do die: Goneril, Cornwall, Regan, Oswald, and Edmund. Even the murdered Cordelia is not innocent, since her obtuseness initiates the whole disaster, including a French invasion of England, something Shakespeare clearly shows to be disgraceful in *King John*. As for the deaths of both Gloucester and Lear, they might be properly attributed to natural causes, simply from old age, not murder. Gloucester certainly dies from excess of happiness on rediscovering his lost son Edgar, and one possible reading may suggest that even Lear dies hopeful of Cordelia's survival. At least in the Folio, authority in his kingdom seems to be taken over by Edgar—the name of one of the most successful kings in British history (see individual play entry). In attacking critics' attempts to limit classification of drama into just two categories, tragedy which ends sadly and comedy which ends happily, Cinthio goes on to say: "Critics fall into this error because they were of the opinion that there cannot be a tragedy which ends happily" (Gilbert, 257). In postulating the superiority of the mixed, positive category of tragedy, he is backed up by Guarini who asserts that his version of it appeals to all levels and types of humanity:

Truly, if today men understood how to compose tragicomedy (for it is not an easy thing to do), no other drama should be put on the stage, for tragicomedy is able to include all good qualities of drama and to reject all bad ones; it can delight all dispositions, all ages and all tastes—something that is not true of the other two, tragedy and comedy, which are at fault because they go to excess. (Gilbert, 512)

Another theatre practitioner, the Spaniard Lope de Vega, sardonically adopts a similar posture in rejecting the high art advocated by the followers of Aristotle, whom he pretends to be addressing respectfully. He argues that such high art as they require simply will not sell, and so he is obliged to surrender to popular tastes:

Not that I am unaware of the rules; thank God that even as an apprentice to grammar I had already read the books which treated of these subjects. . . . But I finally found that the plays in Spain at that time were not as their early makers in the world thought they should be written, but as many untutored writers treated them who worked for the public according to its own rude ways, and thus insinuated themselves into favor to such an extent that whoever now writes plays with art dies without fame or reward. . . . It is true that I have written [plays] in accordance with the art, that few know, but later when from others I saw proceed monstrous things full of theatrical apparatus, to which the crowd and the women who canonize this sad business came running, I returned to the barbarous manner, and when I have to write a play I lock the rules away with six keys; . . . and I write in the manner of devisers who aspired to the acclaim of the crowd; for since it is the crowd that pays, it is proper to speak to it stupidly in order to please. (Gilbert, 542)

So what is this popular kind of mixed drama with a double plot that Castelvetro, Cinthio, and Lope de Vega all agree is required by their modern audiences? It approximates to the genre reviled by Aristotle as an inferior popular type, and called by Guarini "tragedy with a happy ending." Lope expands on the character of this variant:

The tragic mixed with the comic, Terence with Seneca, although it be like another monster of Pasiphae, will make one part grave, the other absurd: and this variety gives much delight. Nature gives a good example, for because of such variety it has beauty. (Gilbert, 544)

Like the drama of many of his contemporaries in the English theatre, Shakespeare's art in general can best be understood by these terms of reference provided by such sources, familiar to him and his European contemporaries, since almost all his plays approximate to some degree to what has often been called "tragicomedy," a term that first appeared as early as the prologue to the *Amphitryon* of Plautus. Its attributes are based exclusively on expedient stage practices, not aesthetic theories, and the precedents do not apply just to Shakespeare's comedies and romances, with their distinctive mixture of acute stress, comic wit, farce, and provocative resolutions.

The frequent failure of some of his plays to match the specifications of academic theories of comedy and tragedy has led to the creation of a dubious academic category of indefinables called "problem plays." These often also include tragedies such as *Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar*, for their failure to conform to Aristotelian norms means that many of Shakespeare's tragedies must be relegated to the same anomalous group, unless we can show that they have their own distinct characteristics. If Shakespearean tragedies have detectable patterns, they are ones which were governed primarily by what theatre audiences welcomed, not by respect for supercilious authorities such as Sidney, who despised the contemporary Elizabethan popular theatre, and whose opinions were thus largely irrelevant to its practices.

Elizabethan plays' structure, characterization, tone, and emotional impact are defined primarily by recurring responses to performances from their popular audiences. So it is not just in his comedies that Shakespeare avoided presenting spectators with painfully "correct" art, offering

audiences instead *What You Will*, or *As You Like It*. We should distinguish between the productions of "play-writers" such as Ben Jonson whose artistic principles seem to be favoured by intellectuals like *Hamlet*, and the practical craftsmanship of traditional "playwrights." Like Lope de Vega, it is to this latter category that Shakespeare primarily belongs, as a craftsman, like a wheelwright or a shipwright, designing works purely for the satisfaction and convenience of his customers, not to meet some supposedly superior standard of excellence, whether aesthetic or metaphysical, such as those promulgated by Renaissance Academies. A carpenter makes a chair from readily accessible materials for its immediate purchaser to sit in comfortably, not for it to be included in some posthumous anthology of Collected Chairs.

UNIT XII
SHAKESPEARE'S WOMEN CHARACTERS

In many of Shakespeare's plays, Shakespeare creates female characters that are presented to be clearly inferior to men. Shakespeare gives each of them a sense of power by giving their minds the ability to change words around, use multiple meanings and answer wisely to the men surrounding them. Although *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello* describes more than one woman in their storylines, the women that stand out particularly in both plays are *The Merchant of Venice*'s Portia and *Othello*'s Desdemona. Both Portia and Desdemona represent women of the seventeenth century who surpassed the norms of sexual morality set for Venetian women of that time. In a time period where the theme of "the outsider" flourished (whether it due to race, gender, religion, etc.), both of these Shakespearean characters stepped outside their roles as "the outsider" to chase their dreams and fulfil their needs.

Portia and Desdemona break the molds of Elizabethan women and pursue their goals with force and a unique indifference to traditional behaviour. These women use their independence, intelligence and want for gender equality in different manners to gain a sense of power and control, which they originally would not have been able to acquire.

Shakespeare's Portia displays all the graces of the perfect Renaissance lady. She is not ambitious; she is quiet rather than restrictive. She is also modest in her self-estimation. Portia is thought of as "a perfect angel" possessing no flaws. Although Portia's personality is strong-willed and determined, her independence is restricted rather than Desdemona's unreserved self-determination. While Portia has limited freedom, she is still able to appear as though she is a free spirit in her position. As a rich heiress, she is obliged by the terms of her father's will to set a puzzle to all prospective suitors, forcing them to choose between three caskets (of gold, silver and lead). Portia is beautiful, gracious, rich, intelligent, quick witted and with high standards in men. She obeys her father's will while having a determination to obtain Bassanio. Although she appears independent, we are told that she feels tightly bound by her dead father's will, which limits her freedom.

Additionally, a critical article ("The Rival Lovers in *The Merchant of Venice*") suggests that the primary action of *The Merchant of Venice* is centered on the struggle between Portia and Antonio for Bassanio's affection, or the competition between friendship and marriage. The critic proposes that Antonio's bond with Shylock represents the merchant's attempt to retain Bassanio's love. As well, the critic describes the fact that Shakespeare creates dramatic tension in the trial scene not only between the rival relationship of Antonio and Shylock, but also through the rivalry nature of Portia and Antonio for Bassanio's love. According to the critic, Antonio's willingness to submit to Shylock's bond reflects his desperate attempt to maintain his relationship with his friend, although he has already been partially displaced by Bassanio's marriage to Portia. The climax of the play, the critic declares, is also the "high point" of Portia's triumph over Antonio. Not only does she ruin Shylock's revenge, but by rescuing

Antonio with a legal technicality, she also breaks the bond which holds her husband emotionally responsible to the merchant. This article suggests that Portia must have required independence in order to win the love of Bassanio and to triumph over Antonio. Without Portia's distinctive independence, she would have not been able to take in upon her own to participate in the suggested rivalry. This is highly unlikely of a woman in Shakespeare's time due to the fact that it would have been the man who selected a partner.

The woman would have been required to act passive and inactive in the start of the relationship. Furthermore, Portia is apparently a set of contradictions. She is a free spirit enduring the strict rules of the time period. She is feminine but strong; and she is happy to rid of many of her suitors yet saddened by her powerlessness to control her nuptial prospects. Her free-spirited manner, strength and happiness to rid of her suitors are traits that emphasize her independence and difference in attitude from the women of that time period.

To conclude, Portia can effortlessly make situations work in her favour. Although she is unable to go out into the world and search for what she truly desires, she is able to manipulate the issues around her in order to get what she wants. Portia was able to successfully test her husband fidelity in the courtroom scene and she freely chose to go to court disguised in order to help her husband's close friend. From this, it is obvious that Portia struggled in breaking away from the restrictions she required enduring, however, she was able to summon up her strength and audacity in order to achieve what she sought after.

Shakespeare's *Othello* presents the reader with a male world in which women have an especially rough time. Desdemona, Emilia, and Bianca are all rejected by their respective partners, and all three love their men unselfishly and unreservedly even when confronted by behaviour that one would consider a reason for divorce. All of these women are engaged in unbalanced partnerships as well. Unlike Portia's restricted and reserved attempt at independence, Desdemona pushes for her own independence ardently and without reservation through various actions in the play. Desdemona appears remarkably forward and aggressive in *Othello*'s account, particularly in relation to the Renaissance expectations of female behavior. She “devour[s] up” his discourse with a “greedy ear”, and is the first of the two to hint at the possibility of their loving one another. *Othello* almost seems uncertain about whether he or Desdemona played the more active role in the courtship. This could mean that he is somewhat uncomfortable (either embarrassed or upset) with Desdemona's aggressive pursuit of him.

The choice of mate made by Desdemona deviated her further from the role in which Venetian society would have traditionally cast her. A critical article (“Shakespeare's Desdemona”) gives explanation to Desdemona's character while maintaining that Shakespeare cautiously balanced the other characters' accounts of her as a goddess or a whore to present an intricate portrayal. The critic also points out that Desdemona's liveliness and boldness are confirmed by her marriage to *Othello* and that these positive traits become a fatal responsibility. In conclusion, the critic ends with a discussion of Desdemona's powerlessness in the face of her husband's accusations, which eventually leads to her death. One may propose that it was *Othello* who was responsible for Desdemona's rebellious behaviour and her magnification of independence. Moreover,

Desdemona also shows her independence while challenging her father and the court while proclaiming her love for *Othello*.

Desdemona lived with her father in Venice before secretly marrying *Othello*. She stands up to her father before the Duke and Council, proclaiming her love for *Othello* and her father reluctantly accepts the union. When Desdemona left her father's house to wed the Moor, it was the first step in redefining her role as a woman. Desdemona, instead of asking her father's permission, decided on her own to marry *Othello*, and it seems as though Desdemona was breaking away from the strictness imposed by Brabantio. She denied her father any right in choosing or granting allowance to *Othello* to marry her. Instead, she chose the man who she wanted to marry and felt it unnecessary that her father interfere with their relationship. This act of independence by Desdemona tore away the gender barriers of the Venetian patriarchal society and posed a threat to male authority.

The critic from the aforementioned article points out that before the senators, Desdemona answers her father's charges powerfully and convincingly, without shyness or discretion. Arguments that see Desdemona as stereotypically weak and submissive ignore the conviction and authority of her first speech ("My noble father, / I do perceive here a divided duty" [I.iii.179-180]) and her abrupt fury after *Othello* strikes her ("I have not deserved this" [IV.i.236]). Lastly, Desdemona's independence is displayed convincingly when she requests to go Cyprus with her husband. Desdemona wanted to accompany *Othello* in his voyages but she is a typical, upper-class female under her father's protection. She naturally would not have been allowed to go outside without someone by her side. Desdemona is rebelliousness due to the fact that she requests something outside of the norm for a woman in the time period. To review, it is clear from Desdemona's keen behaviour that she strives to be independent in a world that thrives in limiting her abilities and capacity for knowledge.

Portia is one of Shakespeare's great heroines, whose beauty, lively intelligence, quick wit, and high moral seriousness have blossomed in a society of wealth and freedom. She is known throughout the world for her beauty and virtue, and she is able to handle any situation with her sharp wit. Even though Portia might have been perceived as an unschooled girl, her inner self possesses the strength, cleverness and experience that enables her to do what she does. The essence of Portia's contribution to the plot can be found in Shakespeare's notoriously discussed court scene. The reader is able to see Portia's intelligence in her outwitting Shylock in the courtroom, her ability to handle situations with quick wit and her desire to marry a non-coloured man.

Disguised as Balthazar, she effectively imitates a man who has been educated through law school. There is a strong suggestion that Shakespeare intended Portia to be not only "learned" but wise as well. Her trial scene reveals a keen sense of manipulation which allows Portia to deal with both sides without bias. Portia is indeed a woman of great eloquence who adapts gracefully to her role as a lawyer. She used her grace and bluntness to make a brilliant case for Antonio's life. Balthazar turns the case around entirely and by the end of the trial Shylock is begging for mercy from Antonio. Portia stunned the courtroom with her arguments and saved the life of her husband's companion.

The protagonist efficiently used her wits and skill to deliver justice to an innocent man and to antagonize Shylock's greedy scheme. Likewise,

Portia possesses the intelligence to use and manipulate words, the beauty to entice men, and a soul that stands above others. Her appearance adds to her angelic reputation and her wisdom allows the audience of the play to acknowledge the theme of deceptive appearances. Throughout the play, Shakespeare uses the characters to illustrate to the audience that a person cannot be judged by how they appear to the eye and that a person can truly be identified by their inner soul.

The reader is able to witness Portia's unlimited wit and sharpness in her speech about 'mercy' in Act Four. Even as she follows the typical procedure of asking Shylock for mercy, Portia reveals her skills by engaging Shylock's meticulous mind. She draws her arguments on a process of reasoning, rather than emotion. Portia first states that the gift of forgiving the bond would benefit Shylock, and that it would raise Shylock to a divine status. She warns Shylock that his quest for justice without mercy may result in his own damnation.

Portia's speech is well-measured and well-reasoned, and portrays 'mercy' as the major issue between Judaism and Christianity. In this speech, one is able to witness Portia's uncanny ability to manage any circumstance with sharp wit. Conjointly, in Act One, the reader learns that Portia has a close relationship with her lady-in-waiting, Nerissa. In their conversation, Portia proves herself as sharp and witty as they discuss her many suitors. However, we also learn that Portia is a racist: “let all of his complexion choose.” Portia is such a fabulously wealthy heiress that the only men eligible to court her are from the highest end of the social strata. As a result, the competition between her suitors is international, including noblemen from various parts of Europe and even Africa.

At the end of the scene, the arrival of the prince of Morocco is announced, introducing a suitor who is racially and culturally more distant from Portia than her previous suitors. The casket test seems designed to give an equal chance to all of these different noblemen, so the competition for Portia's hand and wealth is fair to men of many nations. Portia's remarks about the prince of Morocco's “devilish skin colour” show that she is searching for a husband who is culturally and racially similar to her. In fact, she hopes to marry Bassanio, the suitor with the background closest to hers. Perhaps her strict appeal for a fair-skinned partner is smart for the time period where race was unchallengeable. It would have been considered illogical and irregular to marry “an outsider” during that time. In conclusion, it is apparent from the reader's perspective that Portia is a woman uncharacteristically intelligent and clever for the time period. Generally, through her use of words she is able to manipulate those around her to gain control.

Desdemona is a lady of spirit and intelligence. Her speeches are not as lengthy as those of the men, but with Desdemona every word counts. It is typically in Desdemona's actions that her cunning intelligence is presented to the reader. Desdemona is able to make her own decisions, she makes an effort to stand up to her husband and she gains knowledge from her experiences with her husband of a different culture. The critic from the aforesaid article maintains that Desdemona must have recognized the dignity, energy and power in *Othello* that all the people around her lack. Since these qualities attribute to his heritage, she may be said to choose him because he is “an outsider”. The critic also feels that Desdemona shows courage and an aptitude for risk in choosing *Othello* because it puts her in a dangerous arrangement, cutting her off from her father and the

other countrymen. Desdemona is the daughter of Brabantio, a man of some reputation in Venice, and therefore, she is part of the upper class of Venetian society. It appeared that she had many suitors competing for her hand in marriage, but she freely chose to marry *Othello*. Additionally, the critic observes that Desdemona's liveliness, assertiveness, and sensuality are confirmed in her marrying *Othello*. Without the intelligence that Desdemona possesses, she would not be able to make her own decisions and chose her own fate. As well, before their marriage, Desdemona was a strong-willed, explorative equal to *Othello* while she conversed and related to him as a peer. Her ideas and abilities appealed to him and he regarded her as person capable of creative thought and personal aptitude. Desdemona was constantly striving for her voice to be heard and she demonstrated her intellect through word and deed. One is able to detect the power of Desdemona's intelligence through *Othello*'s keen interest in conversing with her. *Othello* is not only a man of high rank and he too is an intelligent individual. His choosing Desdemona as a wife is viable due to the fact that he would have wanted to marry a woman who could reflect and discuss without great effort.

Desdemona's desire to please her husband can be attributed to her intelligence and liberation. When *Othello* finally confronts Desdemona about cheating, she does not merely listen to his accusations, but instead tries to explain her situation. She could have very easily let *Othello* control her but she made her point known and told the truth about her circumstance. Desdemona, just before her death, challenges *Othello* as she had challenged her father and defends herself with the same straightforward precision she used before the Senate. Additionally, Desdemona shows her desire for new experiences and growth of knowledge when she chooses a husband from another race and culture. Race was not an issue to Desdemona and this was a result of her intelligence and determination to become liberated. Desdemona craved to listen to *Othello*'s accounts of his adventures and of what he had learned in his travels.

To summarize, it is evident that Desdemona is uniquely bright compared to the women in her time, and that through her actions, one is able to observe her ingenuity and cleverness.

In the context of women's education, Portia exemplifies that with knowledge, women may be as effective as men. Though she is clearly capable of being as effective as any male lawyer, Portia is forbidden to do so unless she poses as a man (in the court scene). Shakespeare is thus providing a strong review of the limitations of gender roles and satirizing male superiority (a concept quite radical for his time). Not only is Portia inferior to her father and her father's will, she would typically be inferior in the courtroom. Women would not have been allowed to participate in the procedures of the court. Additionally, Portia is treated as a 'prize' by the many suitors that visit her in hopes of becoming her husband. In Act One, Nerissa lists the suitors who have come to guess-a Neapolitan prince, a Palatine count, a French nobleman, an English baron, a Scottish lord, and the nephew of the duke of Saxony-and Portia criticizes their many faults. Each of the suitors had left without even attempting a guess for fear of the penalty for guessing wrong.

This fact relieves Portia, and both she and Nerissa remember Bassanio, who had visited once before, as the suitor most deserving and worthy of praise. Portia is a wealthy heiress and a beautiful young woman

who would have been viewed as a 'prize' by her suitors. Her being treated as a 'prize' by these men is an additional occurrence in which she is treated lower than the men in the play. What's more, a significant quality that both *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello* have in common is the relationship between fathers and daughters. In the first act at Belmont, Portia complains to Nerissa that she is weary of the world because, as her dead father's will specifies, she cannot decide for herself whether to take a husband. Instead, Portia's various suitors must choose between three chests, one of gold, one of silver, and one of lead, in the hopes of selecting the one that contains her portrait.

The man who guesses correctly will win Portia's hand in marriage. After we see more of Portia, her compliance with her dead father's instructions may seem odd, as she proves to be an extremely independent and strong-willed character. Nevertheless, her adherence to her father's will establish that she plays by the rules. It is obvious in her behaviour that Portia wishes to select a husband for herself. The restricted relationship that Portia obtains with her deceased father advances her struggle to play an equal role as men. Furthermore, in the court scene, Portia appears as an unbiased legal authority, when in fact she is married to the defendant's best friend and is in disguise under a false name. Dressing as a man is necessary since Portia is about to play a man's part, appearing as a member of a male profession. The demands placed upon her by her father's will are gone, and she feels free to act and to prove herself more intelligent and capable than the men around her. It can be concluded that these points are clearly observable proofs that Portia wants to be as equal as the men around her.

Desdemona is very honest, upright and moral and it seems that in this time period she should be submissive to her husband and the men around her. Through Desdemona's craftiness, one is able to conclude that she is attempting to stand up against her inferiority to men. Desdemona is inferior to her husband, her father and other characters including Iago. Desdemona is striving to be equal in her choosing a husband for herself, rather than her father choosing a husband for her. *Othello* opens with a discussion between two men concerning the fate of Desdemona. One of the men is distraught, having tried to win her love but miserably failed, and the other agrees that she is quite a prize.

A 'prize' is not a desired name for Desdemona because in calling her a 'prize', she loses her humanity. Both men are angry and want to seek revenge against the man who won her, slandering Desdemona's name in the process. The men in *Othello* generally have varying attitudes to women, from *Othello*, who idealizes Desdemona, to Iago, who sees love as "merely a lust of the blood and a permission of the will". Desdemona feels unappreciated and substandard to men, and she desires being looked upon as an equal to the men around her.

Desdemona's actions were not necessarily based on the desire to be a man, but more so a desire to have the equal powers of men. By marrying *Othello*, Desdemona was demonstrating that she was strong and educated enough to break the societal confines of submissiveness for women. Once again, the father and daughter relationship in Shakespeare's plays perform an important role. Desdemona's father, Brabantio, feels betrayed when *Othello* marries his daughter in secret. Brabantio twice accuses *Othello* of using magic to seduce his daughter and he repeats the same charge a third time in front of the duke. Even though Shakespeare's audience would have considered elopement with a nobleman's daughter to be serious, Brabantio

insists that he wants to arrest and prosecute *Othello* specifically for the crime of witchcraft, not for eloping with his daughter without his consent. Desdemona decided to take the relationship into her own hands and ignored the tradition of receiving her father's approval. Moreover, women seem not to be favored in Shakespeare's plays. In *Othello,* Shakespeare writes his male character's to view women in a demeaning way. In the seventeenth century, the family of the daughter had all rights to say whom she shall marry.

Desdemona unfortunately sealed her own fate by destroying the gender barriers. Although she is an intelligent woman seeking liberation, she fell into Iago's trap because she loved *Othello* and was upset that he had considered her a “whore.” She was a very trusting person and did not think that Iago would her hurt. Although she was striving to be play an equal role of the men in Venice, at times her sensitivities overpowered her desire to break the gender barriers. The aspect of playing the same role as the men in the Venetian society also explains Desdemona's marriage to *Othello*. In conclusion, instead of Brabantio taking the initiative in the marriage, Desdemona took the initiative in the courtship because she envied the power that her father had over her and the power of *Othello*'s bravery and masculinity. One could consider that Desdemona wished to be a man as brave and as noble as *Othello.*

The Merchant of Venice's Portia is seemingly a series of contradictions. *Othello*'s Desdemona tears away the gender barriers of the Venetian patriarchal society and poses a threat to male authority. Portia uses her restricted independence, and her clever and knowledgeable words to reveal her intelligence and her struggle to play an equal role as men. On the other hand, Desdemona applies her unreserved and ardent self-determination, and her cunning and crafty actions to expose her astuteness and her attempt to attain a role as equal as men. Portia and Desdemona break the molds of Elizabethan women to chase their goals with force and a unique lack of concern to traditional behaviour. In Shakespeare's time, intelligent women were often viewed as a threat to male superiority. However, it seems their attributes often made them capable of dominating their relationships with men and their logic proved equal. As their education increased, so did women's ability to play a significant role in society. The women of Shakespeare's plays were forerunners of the present while they represented triumph of ability and intellect over firm gender roles.

WOMEN IN SHAKESPEARE

In order to proceed in exploring the women’s role in Shakespearean plays, one should consider first the social context to which they belong, i.e. the Elizabethan society, as well as the theme and the plot in which they appear. Despite the power of Elisabeth I, women during this time had very little authority, autonomy, or recognition. Women gained their status based on the position of either their father or their husband. Even more restricting than economic rights were the social and political rights of women. They were expected to be silent observers, submissive to their husbands. Women who attempted to assert their views were seen as a threat to social order. This is significant in that the maintenance of social order was an extremely important aspect of Elizabethan society.

Shakespeare is highly sensitive to his target audience in every step of the writing process. He actively plays upon the beliefs and fears of the Elizabethans. With characters such as Goneril and Cleopatra, Shakespeare demonstrates the devastating effects of female rebellion against social order. Shakespeare invokes sympathy in the audience by creating characters of extreme feminine virtue such as Cordelia, Miranda. However, Shakespeare often creates ambiguous emotions in the audience by introducing an element of intelligence and boldness in the case of Isabella and Desdemona.

Despite the relative insignificance of women in Elizabethan social order, Shakespeare uses them in many significant ways. He seems to be extremely sensitive to the importance of women in society even though they are often overlooked. The idea that men are often a product of the women in their lives is indirectly suggested in the significant impact women have on men in the plays. Isabella has a profound influence in the lives of Angelo and Claudio; Desdemona, by no true fault of her own, turns out to be both a blessing and a curse in the life of *Othello*; Cleopatra is a major cause of Antony's downfall. Although having little respect in the social order of Elizabethan society, Shakespeare recognises women as a real and significant part of society. Like all aspects of Shakespeare's plays, the female characters play a significant role in contributing to plot and theme.

Therefore, both the comedies and the tragedies bear the mark of women, one way or another. In Shakespeare, women do not constitute main characters and yet, they play main parts, meaning that beside every strong male character, there is a woman. For instance, the tragedy of *Othello* is unlike many other Shakespearean plays, in that the leading female characters are wiser and more rational than the main male characters. Throughout the play, quite often the women are the ones who offer reason to the chaotic world led by men. Emilia continually attempts to convince *Othello* of Desdemona's innocence, but he will not listen to her reasoning. Desdemona, despite Iago's innuendoes, is an ideal wife to *Othello*. Iago, with his devilish plans and *Othello*, with his uncontrollable jealousy represent the evil in the play while the women reflect the goodness and sanity.

Desdemona is the prototype of womanhood. She is very charming, symbolising the woman ready to face the unknown of marriage being lured into the mystery that surrounds her husband. Very beautiful and tender, she is a true gentle woman, but becomes the naive victim in this tragedy. She falls in love with a man who is older, poorer, and uglier than she is. She pities him because of his tragic life and respects him for his endurance for pain. She displays her rational and brave characteristics when she stands up to her father and tells him that, like her mother, she must show her 'duty' to her husband. This young woman also boldly asks the Duke if she can go with *Othello* to Cyprus so that she will not just be a 'moth of peace' while her noble husband is fighting for their country. The Duke, like all of the characters in the play, respects Desdemona and her wishes and allows her to leave with *Othello*.

Every person, both male and female, respects and praises Desdemona. Iago repeatedly speaks of Desdemona's 'honest' and 'goodness'. Both he and Cassio agree that she is a 'most exquisite lady'. Emilia also shows her admiration of her when she defends Desdemona's

honour to *Othello*. She tries to convince him that his wife is 'honest, chaste, and true'. Desdemona is a loyal spouse who will do absolutely anything for her husband. Even when he is falsely accusing her of adultery and sin, Desdemona defends *Othello*. Desdemona does not blame him; she tries to understand what has upset him. She is an unselfish victim who defends her husband to the very end of her life. Even when *Othello* kills her in a jealous rage, Desdemona does not want her husband to be responsible for her death. She claims that 'nobody, I myself' committed this tragic deed. Her death does not destroy either the ideal of the ideal marriage, or that of love, but only that of the impulsive and hazardous marriage.

Another important female character in *Othello* is **Emilia**. Like Desdemona, she is a brave and respectable character. However, she is not naive like Desdemona. Emilia repeatedly attempts to teach the innocent Desdemona about the evils of life. She has to convince Desdemona that there are women who betray their husbands. Carefully watching over Desdemona, Emilia constantly tries to warn her that jealousy is a 'monster'. She is not at all afraid of men and does not think twice about defending Desdemona's honour to the raging *Othello*. Emilia is confident, calm, and rational when dealing with the men in this play. When Iago mocks her uncontrollable 'tongue', Emilia does not overreact to his insults. She mostly ignores his comments and says just enough to defend herself. She knows that her husband is just trying to make himself look better, showing off for the people around him. Emilia is a loyal wife to Iago and helps him unknowingly carry out his evil plans. However, when she discovers the truth behind his lies, she fearlessly exposes him and all of his schemes. Emilia is a stout-hearted woman who will do anything to defend innocent Desdemona and the truth.

Another important gentle-hearted female character is **Ophelia,** *Hamlet*'s unfortunate lover. She is a naive young woman, who seems lost in the world surrounding her; she is an obedient, childish and loving woman through her clothing, yet maiden through her desires. She is involved in a tensioned human world, always torn between fateful decisions. She seems to belong to another world, to another dimension; therefore, she does not belong to the world she has to live in. This will eventually kill her, as she is incapable to fit in, to understand her own father and her lover. Because her naivety, she is lost in a world too cruel for her fragile soul. This character, who seems like having feminine perfume running in her veins rather than human blood, lives an unhappy life, being torn between her father's death, her lover's not respecting her deep feelings and her brother's treating her like a child.

The very same tragedy is also marked by another feminine presence: **queen Gertrude**, *Hamlet*'s mother. She is trapped into living with her husband's murderer, but her gesture is not to be justified in any way. She becomes the prisoner of the secret she has to keep, thus becoming the symbol of sin she displays with duplicity. Her behaviour, wrapped up in some mysterious deeds known only be she, constitute the example of virtuosity of those possessed by power. She is constant with herself, but fate has her killed by the very same poison and by the very same man who caused her husband's death. Therefore, fate's fury, does not allow her to live any longer. She has to die, and her death does not aggrieve anyone.

Another female character even more obsessed with power, is **Lady *Macbeth*.** She is a 'sexless' character who seems to have forgotten that she was born a woman. Together with her husband, she seems to have been built after a devilish pattern. Evil and ambition gradually take control over her soul and deeds, worsening her consciousness. We assist to a process of desperation, slowly gliding towards death. She is pushing her husband towards fulfilling the witches' prophecies, as her strongest desire is that of becoming queen at any costs.

As a consequence, her soul is emptied by feelings, becoming insensitive to murder. Therefore, she does not hesitate to push her husband into killing the king. She even humiliates him, calling him a coward; her strong will destroys *Macbeth*'s doubts, as she's the one leading the dagger in her husband's hands: his hands are but tools of her criminal mind. Very self-possessed, (at least, in the beginning), she directs the whole crime stage, but little by little, her security seems like fading, as internal turmoil fills her soul and marks her behaviour. She loses control and becomes insane. Therefore, Lady *Macbeth*, who used to think that consciousness is only for the coward ones, is ruined by the sentiment of guilt, and her only salvation is death. But the one who dies is not as much the female as it is a person dominated by the distorted sense of power.

Other female characters obsessed with power, but not to such a great extent as Lady *Macbeth*, are *King Lear*'s elder daughters, **Goneril** and **Regan**. Their deeds are wicked, their morality is overridden, trampled, their cruelty has no limits. They develop the Godly feeling about themselves, considering that they are allowed to encroach upon the obligations towards their father, that a kingdom can be ruled according to their own wish, without any sense of responsibility. After becoming powerful, their character becomes primitive, selfish.

With all the evil residing in this play, **Cordelia** is the epitome of goodness. She is loving, virtuous, and forgiving. She also demonstrates law and order in that she is a devoted daughter and has great respect for her father and his position. Cordelia, though, is a tragic character, for her kindness and her staying on the boundaries of the social norms of the Elizabethan age, ironically turned out to be her tragic downfall. Many people have been quite moved and bemused by her death, many of which deemed it as injustice.

Cordelia's role in the play may be that of an angel – like the character who makes the distinction between good and evil more visible, or who makes us more aware of a crumbling society where many things were opposite to what one might think it should be, with evil generally prevailing over the good (which to some degree is prophetic to today's society). The truth is that her presence is needed in order to counterbalance the effect of her two elder sisters' cruel deeds.

Somewhere in between Cordelia's tenderness, on the one hand, and Lady *Macbeth*'s cruelty, on the other, lies the 'Queen of love', **Cleopatra**. Her character is one dominated by love. She takes control over life through love's strings but when something happens and she loses control over theses strings, she becomes heartless, cruel. She's both an angel and a demon in the same time. Tenderness and cruelty mingle in her soul and these two keep inter-reacting all the time under different shapes. Shakespeare also emphasises on how, by acting in such an aggressive manner, Cleopatra upsets the natural order of a male dominated society. By encapsulating in one person what all men want, sex and power,

Shakespeare created a character that can direct men even if they are not aware that they are being used for her selfish goals.

Cleopatra is contrasted by **Octavia** who yields in every matter to men. This would parallel the Jacobean mind-set that women were subservient to men and should not voice their own opinions. Octavia is the chaste and pure 'white beauty', while Cleopatra is the 'black' seductress. It is these exotic qualities that lure Anthony back to Egypt like a moth to a flame. It is this tension between two opposing natures that adds tension to the tragedy. By placing importance on their differences Shakespeare covers a broad spectrum of womanhood.

Another well-defined representative of womanhood is the character of **Miranda** from *'The Tempest'* who is extremely compelling for two reasons. First, it is important to note that Miranda is the only female character who appears in the entire play. This is the only Shakespearean play where a character has this kind of outstanding distinction. This is not just a fluke on the part of Shakespeare, for it is very important that the character of Miranda appears by herself. The reader is not able to compare her beauty and virtue to any other female in the world of *'The Tempest'*, and this serves both to show her value as a character and the fact that no other living women has the virtue of Miranda. While Miranda may not have many outstanding lines or soliloquies, she makes up for this in sheer presence alone. Miranda's character encompasses all the elements of perfectionism and goodness which is lacking in all the other respective characters. All of the other characters in '*The Tempest*' are reflected by Miranda, and even if she did not speak one line she would still serve this important purpose.

Secondly, Miranda also serves as the ultimate fantasy for any bachelor. She is extremely beautiful, intelligent and she has never been touched (or even seen) by another male. Miranda personifies the ultimate source of good in the play, and provides the ultimate foil for the evil character of Caliban. Finding a woman this humble in the world of Shakespeare is almost impossible. Miranda shows a positive attitude which is almost awkward when compared to the other characters. In all of the collected works of Shakespeare, not one character is as overwhelmingly pure as Miranda.

Even the nun Isabella in *'Measure for Measure'* wouldn't perform the virtuous act of sacrificing her virginity to save her brother's life. Miranda certainly would perform this act, because unlike Isabella she would place value on another person's life before protecting her own ego. In this and all the facets of her character Miranda appears almost Christ-like, and it is this extreme propensity towards goodness and purity which enables Miranda to become an irreplaceable character.

UNIT XIII
SHAKESPEARE'S SONGS-MUSIC IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

STRUCTURE

Introduction
Elizabethan Music
Shakespearean Music
Songs and Music in Shakespearean plays
Influence
Music in Shakespeare's Plays
Shakespeare's Dramatic Use of Songs

INTRODUCTION

English art and culture reached to its excellence during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. This era experienced a shift from sacred music to more secular one and the rise of instrumental music. Music had become a profession itself and professional musicians were being hired by the Church of England, the aristocrats and also by the rising middle class. Elizabeth herself was very fond of music and used to play the lute. During her reign, Elizabeth I employed almost 70 musicians. The two most popular musical instruments of her time were the Virginal and the Lute. The most popular musician of the lute and the lute songs were John Dowland and after him the greatest was Henry Purcell.

ELIZABETHAN MUSIC

The professional companies, who used to put on plays during this era, used much reduced musical resources. Generally one adolescent boy actor used to sing and play one instrument and the clowns also used to sing. The Jigg, a special musical comic genre was the domain of famous Shakespearean comedians like Richard Tarlton, William Kempe. Jiggs refer to the bawdy, low comedy burlesques, which were used to be put on at the conclusion of historical plays or tragedy. They involved two to five characters and were sung to popular melodies and accompanied by the cittern or the fiddle.

It was a regular custom to include at least one song in every play in Tudor and Stuart drama. The tragedies were the only exceptions. Shakespeare however denied this tradition by including songs in his later tragedies like *'Othello', 'King Lear'*, and '*Hamlet*'. Most of the plays by other dramatist had a tendency to include a lament to be sung by high-pitched or shrill voice and accompanied by consort of viola. Shakespeare parodied this genre through the interlude performance on Pyramus and Thisbe in '*A Midsummer Night's Dream'.*

SHAKESPEAREAN MUSIC

Shakespeare used to assign most of his songs to the characters like servants, clowns, fools, rogues and minor characters. Most of the songs were used to be addressed to the protagonists themselves.

SONGS AND MUSIC IN SHAKESPEAREAN PLAYS

In William Shakespeare plays like '*Antony and Cleopatra'* the boy musician of the company, was showed to sing a song about drinking. Shakespeare in his plays used both the songs of Shakespeare times as well as the songs composed by him.

- Shakespeare used songs to invoke various moods. In '*Twelfth Night'* the song '**O mistress mine**', sung by Robert Armin in the role of Feste the fool, is directed towards Sir Andrew Aguecheek and also it hinted towards Viola's androgynous nature, as we can see in the line, '**that can sing both high and low**'. The songs, used in *'Macbeth', 'Othello', 'The Tempest'* also help to set the mood right. In '*A Midsummer Night's Dream'* the song, '**you spotted snakes**' has been sung by the fairies as a lullaby, in '*The Tempest',* '**come unto these yellow sands**' sung by Ariel reassures the arrival of the shipwrecked travellers in the magical island.
- The Ritualistic songs have been used as conclusion of plays like at the end of '*A Midsummer Night's Dream'* Titania, the fairy queen asks the fairies to "**First, rehearse your song by rote/ To each word a warbling note/ Hand in hand, with fairy grace/ Will we sing, and bless this place**."
- Songs have been used to establish character or mental state too. Iago in *'Othello'* sang songs to give himself the appearance of a tough man. In *'King Lear'* and *'Hamlet'* Edgar and Ophelia acts as a mad person through singing folksongs.
- Shakespeare also used instrumental music of viola and lutes in order to produce the setting, mood of the play. The instrument Hoboys or the Ill wind was used to set the sombre mood, as in *'Hamlet', 'Macbeth'.* Viol and lute were used to ease melancholy.

INFLUENCE

Shakespeare's plays inspired musicians like Henry Purcell, Benjamin Britten, Barlioz, Verdi and so on. Purcell composed an orchestra on *'A Midsummer's Night Dream* for his opera, *'The Fairy Queen'.* Britten too composed a musical version of *'A Midsummer Night's Dream'.* Giuseppe Verdi composed musical opera on *'Macbeth'*. Berlioz too, made several musical adaptations of *'Romeo and Juliet', 'The Tempest', 'Hamlet'* and so on.

MUSIC IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

Elizabethans, during the time of the notorious William Shakespeare (1564-1616), were extremely sensitive to beauty and grace and had an

undying enthusiasm for music and poetry. Music was a vital part of Elizabethan society; it was thought that a man who could not read music or understand it was poorly educated. The common entertainment and amusement was centered on music, song, and dance, people of all classes enjoyed the splendour of the music at this time. Since music was so popular and so widely understood, it is little wonder that most Elizabethan plays, including Shakespeare’s plays, have music in them.

Shakespeare uses music in his plays for several reasons, all of which are extremely significant. The first is evident in which music was so popular during this time that it influenced the performed plays. Shakespeare had a mixed audience who enjoyed and attended his plays. Music, which was understood practically universally allowed everyone to understand his plays and relate to them more easily. If people did not understand the language or the plot, the music could make it easier for them to follow along.

Secondly, on the stage music played a very important role. Music contributed to the atmosphere and set the mood in many of Shakespeare’s plays. There was a special musicians’ gallery above the stage, the music sometimes was played on the stage, and there were occasions when it was played under the stage to achieve an eerie effect. During comedy plays gentle songs would be played with the lute and during tragedies and histories the sounds of trumpets and drums would echo through the theatre. For example, if a king entered the trumpets would sound and everyone would know who it was. The *Twelfth Night* is also a good example; it includes instrumental serenades and rousing drinking songs, all to show the gaiety and sadness for the mood of the play.

Some songs and music are intended to represent a soliloquy, when private thoughts and feelings are performed. Songs, music, and sound effects represent themes, tones, moods, emotions, and even people. Shakespeare, being a lyric poet, used fifty or more songs in his plays and wrote hundreds of stage directions calling for music. He used the time and society he lived in to benefit and influence the structure of his plays.

The time and society were influenced by music and song, so Shakespeare utilized this fascination to impact his plays. Music was a part of Elizabethan society so William Shakespeare made it apart of his plays. Music was a wonderful representation of society, mood, theme, emotion, and people in all of William Shakespeare’s plays, and even though we may not see it music may have this same affect in our society today.

SHAKESPEARE'S DRAMATIC USE OF SONGS

In the great majority of Shakespeare's plays there is some singing; and the exceptions are mainly those plays which are at least his, or are least characteristic of his genius. There is, if nothing more, a scrap of a ballad, or a stage direction for a song in every comedy but the *Comedy of Errors*, and in all the tragedies which are associated with the name of Shakespeare but *Titus Andronicus*, *Timon of Athens*, *Coriolanus*, and as I believe, the true text of *Macbeth*, — in a word, the most stern and drastic of the plays.

In the historical dramas, being of peculiar genesis and nature, there are songs only in the two parts of *Henry IV*, and in *Henry VIII*. As poems, these songs have roused delight and a delicate affection in the hearts of generations. Where is there any one with the least feeling for poetry to

whom the mere repetition of the first line of "Where the bee sucks, there suck I," or "Hark! hark! the lark," or "Under the greenwood tree," is not as the breath of a spring breeze? As words for music, they have inspired literally hundreds of composers, some of them to compositions of entrancing beauty. They have been made the subject of much laudation and critical analysis. But there seems to be no general treatment of their dramatic function; — their part in the plays and their relation to the characters singing them. It is the purpose of the present paper to discuss these topics.

The great number of the songs — some forty that are more than fragments, besides stage directions for six more, and about fifty snatches of ballads — impresses a modern reader as unnatural; but as the first pages of Chappell's *Popular Melodies of the Olden Time* show, singing was universal in England in Elizabethan times. The meadow, the street, the barber-shop, rang with popular melodies. It is also, of course, well known that the standard of vocal accomplishment in those days was not high. We have authentic records of the much later introduction into England of the Italian art of singing. With the advance of the art, singing has become more and more the business of specialists, who sing much better than anybody in Shakespeare's England, but who make ordinary people ashamed to sing for their own or others' pleasure in company.

The stage of the present day, as a consequence, will not tolerate a song not sung with a finish and skill unknown to the actors of the Globe and the Curtain. When every gentleman, nay, every tinker and carter, sang to kill time, having neither tobacco nor newspaper, the stage naturally reflected the customs of the day. Again, as there was neither regular concert nor vaudeville in those days, the legitimate theatre was the only place where public singing could be heard; and hence an actor who sang agreeably was listened to with a patience such as no modern audience would show. The abundance of music in Shakespeare's and other Elizabethan plays is nothing individual, but was the most natural thing in the world, when England was still vocal and merry.

As to the personages into whose mouths the songs are put, Mr. G. Bernard Shaw said once, at a meeting of the Browning Society in London, when someone had quoted the hackneyed lines from *Twelfth Night*, so often pressed into service to prove Shakespeare' s surpassing love for music, that he should not like to sit down to dinner with the singers in Shakespeare. Complete songs are sung by fools, by pert pages, by men in liquor, by servants; by Autolycus the rogue, Caliban the monster, Iago the demi-devil; by Pandarus and Proteus; by Ariel and the fairies; by Ophelia, when mad, by Desdemona. In the company there is but one respectable man, Amiens, a mere walking gentleman, and but one noble woman in full possession of her intellect. Snatches of song are sung by such people as Falstaff, Petruchio, Mercutio, old Evans in the *Merry Wives*, the grave-digger in *Hamlet*, and Edgar when simulating insanity.

The snatches and scraps of song, as they interrupt the play least and are most like conversation, are the easiest of explanation. A frequent form taken by a trivial contest of wit in Shakespeare is the pert application of bits of familiar songs. Thus Rosaline in *Love's Labors Lost* (iv, 1: 129) sings jestingly to Boyet:

"Thou canst not hit it, hit it;
Thou canst not hit it, my good man."

and Boyet replies:

"An I cannot, cannot, cannot,
An I cannot, another can."

The free and easy wit, Mercutio, points his conversation (*R. J.*, ii, 4; 140, 151) with bits of verse, in which popular songs or improvisations to familiar tunes are employed as quips and jeers. The clown in *All's Well* (i, 3; 63, 73) is merely pert. Touchstone's farewell to the priest (*A. Y. L*. iii, 3, 101) is more like Mercutio' s farewell to the Nurse in *Rorneo and Juliet*. Men of vacant minds at ease troll snatches of song, as the grave-digger in *Hamlet*, Petruchio, when he sits down at home and is drawing off his boots (*T. S*., iv, 1, 143, 148), and Falstaff taking his ease in his inn (*H. IV*, Pt. 2, ii, 4, 36). Evans, in the *Merry Wives* (iii, 1, 16), covers his fear by singing. Men who are exhilarated by drinking sing snatches of song. The most exquisite example is Silence (*H. IV*, Pt. 2, v, 3). He caps every speech with an irrelevant line or two from a ballad: "Be merry, be merry!" "Fill the cup and let it come!" Falstaff says: "Why now you have done me right."

"*Silence*. Do me right
And dub me knight,
Samingo!
Is't not so!
"*Falstaff*. 'Tis so.
"*Silence*. Why, then, say an old man can do some-
what!"

The fine scene with Sir Toby Belch, Sir Andrew Aguecheek and the Clown in *Twelfth Night* (ii, 3) will be recurred to later. Fools, who will be spoken of again, and mad persons betray their light headedness by irrelevant scraps of melody. Under this disguise the hysterical tenderness of the Fool in *Lear* is hidden; his shafts of keen but loving satiric wit are couched in the form of improvisations and parodies of popular songs, sung to familiar tunes. Edgar in his pretence of madness sings scraps of song, Ophelia does like-wise, and it is in the scene where *Hamlet* confirms in the mind of Polonius the belief in his madness that *Hamlet* repeats, or as I think more likely, sings, a line or two of an old song. In fine, the singing of snatches of melody is, on Shakespeare's stage at best undignified, and usually unbalanced.

The complete songs present a more attractive and a more complicated problem. A few are mere epilogues, as is the song "When that I was and a little tiny boy," at the end of *Twelfth Night*. The actor who first played the part was a favorite singer, and an Elizabethan audience was glad of the opportunity to hear him sing a popular song it is not by Shakespeare after the play was over. The two songs with which *Love's Labors Lost* closes are in effect epilogues. Unlike the epilogue of *Twelfth Night*, they must be by Shakespeare. No other writer combined such vividness of concrete phrase, humor, and refined sweetness of diction as are present in these two songs. Yet they are mere tags to the play.

Other songs have a mechanical or technical function. They help to shift a scene or to bring in an aside. For example, in *As You Like It*, two people go out. It is desired to bring them on the stage again almost immediately, two hours or more being supposed to pass in the interval. A song is interpolated (iv, 2) between the two appearances, a lively song with a lot of bustle on the stage, — "What shall he have that kills the deer?" Dr. Johnson complained that this "noisy scene," in which nothing was transacted, was supposed to occupy two hours. So it did to the imagination.

It took up the mind for the moment, broke the current of thought completely, and when the next scene opened, the auditor only felt that an indefinitely long space of time had elapsed since the personages then on the stage had left it. We must remember that there was no curtain closing off the whole stage, and no such decisive change of the scenery as is possible now.

Or again, where Proteus sings Thurio's song to Sylvia (*T. G.* iv, 2, 31), Julia is enabled to catch the proof of his faithlessness more easily and with less appearance of spying than if she listened to speech addressed to Sylvia alone. Likewise in *Much Ado* (ii, 3, 64), Balthazar's song, "Sigh no more, ladies," gives the opportunity to make Benedick's hiding and detection more effective.

But these are after all superficial effects, mere accidents of the playwright's trade, having little to do with the fundamentally dramatic elements in the plays. Can we not find in Shakespeare's employment of songs a finer art than is exhibited in these tricks and devices? A drama is an action; a connected sequence of human deeds. These deeds of the characters proceed from their will, or unconsciously reveal their characters. An action, then, brings together the two worlds, the world within us and the world without. A deed is dramatic, as Freytag tells us, if it is the result of an inward struggle, reaching a decisive determination, with consequences in the outer world; an event is dramatic if it acts on the inner life and affects the character. Will, then, is the supremely dramatic element of human nature. Further, an act to be dramatic must be part of a transaction, of a plot. Thus the appearance of the ghost in *Hamlet* is dramatic; it affects the action of *Hamlet*'s mind, and has consequences psychological and material. *Hamlet*'s mental struggles are dramatic; they affect the decision of his will, and determine the fortunes of others. *Hamlet* is a dramatic character: we see in him an effort to adjust the outer and the inner world. Ophelia is not in the same degree dramatic. In her case we deal not so much with acts and consequences as with fixed emotional conditions.

Melody, it is obvious, is in some respects the opposite of dramatic. It is the index and the natural result of definite emotional conditions with vague results in the world of action. It looks to no consequences; it is complete in its own paradise. Its seed is in itself, like the fruit tree created by divine power in the beginning of the world. A song sung naturally gives us a picture, not an incident; is static, not progressive. Thus in an Italian opera the conspicuous scenes are points of emotional over welling, — joy, aspiration, retrospect, — in which the mood of a single figure dominates the stage. The aria is finished, the story is moved on by a quasi-conversation, and a new emotional picture is given. "Arsace returns — I rejoice"; "Margherita! How beautiful you look in the jewels"; "Ah, what a fright I had last night!" The melodies of the Elizabethan age were gentle and closed in short space, and were therefore frequently recurrent. They are accordingly conspicuously incompatible with decided action and forward movement of the plot.

Songs, and especially such songs, are fit for one class of scenes above all — convivial scenes. Joy is its own justification. It looks neither forward nor backward, but simply bubbles out in ecstatic song, dance, and frolic. Song is the absolute ideal expression of joy, in real life as on the stage. Naturally, every convivial scene in Shakespeare contains snatches of singing, more often than not accompanying a complete song. There are

five notable passages of bacchanalian gaiety in Shakespeare's plays: the one in *Henry IV*, Pt. 2, already referred to, in which Silence gradually gets drunk as an accompaniment to fragments of a dozen ballads; the scene in *Othello* (ii, 31) in which Iago tempts Cassio, and sings a pair of jolly songs; the scene in *Antony and Cleopatra* (iii, 2) in which Pompey entertains the triumvirs, and the boy sings "Come, thou monarch of the vine"; the scene in the *Tempest* (ii, 2), in which Stephano and Caliban sing; and the scenes in *Twelfth Night* (ii, 1 and 3), in which the musical fool entertains the two knights, and Sir Toby afterwards becomes irrepressibly vocal.

The central song of the last passage, "O mistress mine," completely and purely expresses delight in living, but in it there is nothing dramatic, not so much as special appropriateness to the character of the singer. It is, of course, something to cause reflection that such words should be put into the mouth of a professional entertainer singing to two old sinners. We know Elizabethan England could provide plenty of ribald songs; but testimony of the most irrefutable nature assures us that the sympathies of the time were sufficiently pure for very ordinary fellows; boors even, to delight in such strains as these. Several of the drinking songs are designed to be in keeping with the characters who sing them, — for example, Stephano's vulgar tavern songs, and Caliban's grotesque canticle of freedom; and no doubt the drinking song in *Antony and Cleopatra* is designedly classical in its allusions.

The central function of Shakespeare's songs, however, the function of the songs most loved and best remembered, is to give a tone, usually a glamor and a sense of romance, to a whole play. Proteus's song to Sylvia, the only song in Shakespeare actually sung by a lover to his mistress, and by him under pretense of acting as a deputy, is the song of a faithless lover, and its substance has no peculiar fitness to the situation. Only the age and time and place wherein such songs are sung is raised and ideal. In *Cymbeline* it is Cloten who causes to be sung the "hunt's-up," — "Hark! hark! the lark"; but the charm of the song makes the whole play beautiful with the light of morning, while the song of the two boys by "fair Fidele's grassy tomb" perfumes it as with the breath of violets.

It is in the woodland romances that this effect is most plain; as is natural from the traditions of Elizabethan song. It is largely, if not mainly, pastoral in spirit. The pastoral form has never taken firm hold in English literature, but the pastoral spirit has been vital there as in few literatures, a spirit of delight in rural life, felt by people near enough to enjoy it, far enough to appreciate it, and sophisticated enough to idealize it. In the pastoral romances, elegant and refined shepherdesses, or princesses disguised as such, are wooed by elegant and chivalrous shepherds; and both of them fill every pause with song. When the hero is sad, he sings; when hopeful, he sings; when he has nothing to do, he sings; when he is going to do something, he sings; and when he has done something, he sings.

We are told what passion his songs display, but when we read the verses the passion seems to have evaporated, leaving usually a *caput mortuum*, but sometimes a delicate savor of gentle and romantic beauty, and a strange and sweet union of sincerity and artificiality. Such are the songs and pastorals of Breton, the successful songs of Lodge and Greene, and such in the drama are the golden songs of Peele, and Lyly's "Cupid and my Campaspe." Arcadia is a kind of fairyland, and Cupid and other

delicate mythological fancies from the gardens of Alexandria are not unfit associates for the princesses of curds and cream who dwell there. The appropriateness of such songs to the Forest of Arden is evident, even though a clearer air blows in it than in the sometimes "musky alleys" of Arcadian groves. Without "Under the greenwood tree," "Hey, ding-a-ding," and "Blow, blow, thou winter wind," how much even of the charm of Rosalind would be lost.

Fairies and sweet spirits of course sing. One might think song would be their natural speech; but this is not the case. Fairies and witches speak in a special metre, but they speak. Yet the incantations of fairyland are often sung:

"Ye spotted snakes, with double tongue,
Thorny hedge-hogs, be not seen;
Newts and blind worms, do no wrong;
Come not near our fairy queen."

At the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a stage direction calls for a song and dance of the fairies to hallow the house; and the pretended fairies in *The Merry Wives* play their pranks with a song, reminding us how in Lyly's plays no mischief of page or fairy but is performed to singing. The scenes in *Macbeth* containing stage directions for a song are generally regarded as spurious, and while the witches must intone "Double, double," or deliver it in recitative, the metrical structure of the verses which accompany this refrain seem to make a regular tune for the words very unlikely. Ariel is a creature of song. His element is even more ethereal than that of the fairies, and he is represented nearly always as exercising his magic influence, or as in an ecstasy beyond expression except through song. Hence he sings always.

Fools are all singers. They are professional entertainers, they are emotionally unbalanced, hysterical, and excitable, and song, whether fragmentary or complete, is appropriate in their mouths. Rogues also sing. Like fools, they make a business of entertaining; and their irresponsibility is marked by their giving themselves up to impulse, instead of looking to the remote consequences of action. Illustrations are Falstaff, Pandarus, Autolycus.

Rogues and fools are generally but two species of the same genus in Shakespeare, and both alike are usually given something of the golden charm of Arcadian life such as pervades the atmosphere of *As You Like It*. Autolycus in particular through his songs expresses the delights of irresponsible living sweetly and perfectly.

Effective men do not sing in Shakespeare, Iago may seem to be an exception; but Iago sings not to sing but to seduce. He sings as a dramatic act, with purpose and with effect in the plot. He assumes the appearance of unthinking good-fellowship and in doing so displays another of the gifts which his creator lavished upon him. We may be sure he was a creditable vocalist as well as a ready improvisator.

A station of dignity is incompatible with singing, on the stage of Shakespeare, either by man or woman. Hence great personages who desire to hear music call for it, and the actual singing is performed by a servant or attendant, usually a young person. Here, of course, the influence of practical exigencies in determining the assignment of roles must be recognized. Singing parts would naturally be taken by the best vocalist in the company; and a company would be strangely fortunate in which the best vocalist possessed also the abilities qualifying him for the nobler roles.

In principle, *Hamlet* as a complete gentleman should be a musician; but *Hamlet*s who can rise to the part are not so common that the choice should be limited by adding dispensable requirements to the absolute necessities of the part. Often, indeed, the singer might not have histrionic talent for even humble roles.

Hence, the playwright, except where assured of uncommon powers possessed by the singing actor, could safely offer him only a colourless part, or at best one of little variety, in which he could be coached. Yet, after all allowances and abatements are made, it is plain that like all other wise artists, like the painter in oil who "feels his medium," or the architect who is aware that the same ideas cannot be expressed in marble, iron, and brick, Shakespeare has by accepting the limitations of his art, made them the means of characteristic effects. It is to be observed that even the noble personages who care for music in Shakespeare are in general a little soft. It is the love-sick duke in *Twelfth Night* who is consoled by listening to Feste and finds "music the moody food of love." Brutus asks the boy Lucius for a song, and the emotional tenderness of Brutus, hidden under his mask of stoicism, is often suggested.

The melancholy Jaques, who be weeps the deer, calls for Amiens' first song; and though the banished duke asks for the second, he does not listen, but talks to Orlando. The songs at the ladies' windows, "Hark! hark! the lark," and "Who is Sylvia?" are conventional compliments, and indicate no interest in music on the part of either Cloten or Thurio. It is a trait of the character of *Othello*, a man of action, that he "does not greatly care to hear music," and of Benedick that he says, "A horn for my money I" To be sure, Benedick tries to sing when he is in love; but he makes himself ridiculous in the attempt.

Among women, the forsaken and unhappy lady is solaced by song. Mariana in her moated grange hears her page sing "Take, oh, take those lips away." Queen Katharine in *Henry VIII* listens to "Orpheus with his lute," — the convention is the same whether the scene be Shakespeare's or not. The reason why decent, effective, and dignified men do not sing or appear to care much for song in Shakespeare is that they are responsible persons in the world of action: it is the passive characters in tragedy who sing or are comforted by song. It is the pathetic situation of the woman, a passive character, overcome by fate not deserved, the satellite of the active characters, which is thus accentuated, — pathetic, I say, not tragic, overcoming by pity, not associated with terror. Ophelia's songs are of this nature, and Desdemona's song of "Willow, Willow," owes its dramatic effect to the same sentiment. It is a curious illustration of the difficulty felt in the Shakespearean drama of combining external dignity with the act of singing that the one lady should be mad when she sings, and that the other should be in the utmost privacy of her home, and overcome by melancholy sentiment.

In reading Shakespeare's dramas for the purposes of this study, I have been surprised to observe how many scenes, whether musical or not, are mainly contributory to the atmosphere and background, instead of the action, of the plays. The intense scenes are in this way provided with foils, and the attention is not jaded by too constant excitement. Thus to some of the most active plays are given serenity and gentleness, qualities which predominate in the personal impression left by Shakespeare.

UNIT XIV
CLOWNS AND FOOLS IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAY

STRUCTURE

Introduction
Clowns and Fools in Shakespeare's Plays
Critical Essay of Shakespeare

INTRODUCTION

The fool or the clown plays an integral part in most of Shakespeare's plays. In *Macbeth* we have the drunken porter at the gate. His unconscious wit adds to the terseness of the drama. Among Shakespeare's fools, the best known are Touchstone and Feste and the fool in '*King Lear*'. In Shakespeare, there are also the clowns who are unintentionally funny - like Bottom in 'Midsummer Night's Dream' and Dogberry and Verges in '*Much ado about Nothing*'. As pointed out by Gordon, the true extremes of clowning were the rustic fool and the Court Jester. All the varieties are the mixtures of the two. "They were there to make the company or the audience laugh." The Elizabethan audience, to be sure, was very fond of being tickled by the jokes of the clown. Shakespeare had to comply with their tastes.

Shakespeare had to write a part for Will Kempe in his plays. He was the original of Dogberry in 'Much ado' and Peter in "*Romeo and Juliet*". He probably took the part of Launcelot, Touchstone, Feste and of the grave-digger in *Hamlet*. Shakespeare's clown was, therefore, written with one eye on Kempe as Moliere's clowns were created for Scaramouch. Shakespeare's clown, however, were superior to those of other playwrights of his day, not only in their wit and honour, but also in the fact that they were human beings. It may be the clown or the fool is a direct descendant of the devil or the vice, the fun makers in the morality plays. There is also something of the court fool or jester in Shakespeare's fools.

CLOWNS AND FOOLS IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

Olivia in *Twelfth Night* justifies the privileges of the fool saying that there was no harm in an avowed fool. Feste himself glorifies the fool with the words that he wears not motley in his brain. He further remarks 'Better a witty fool than a foolish wit. Viola also appreciates Feste in her comments: "This fellow is wise enough to play the fool: and to do that well, needs a kind of wit. Palmer in his criticism caps Viola's comment with the words "He will see things as they are, but without malice". Shakespeare's fools and clowns may be classified, according to Gordon as those who play with or who are played with, by words. Touchstone and Feste come under the first category. Dogberry and Verges and the

hempen homes puns in ‘ Midsummer Night’s Dream’ come under the second.

Shakespeare’s fools generally appear as servants of principal characters. Touchstone is the servant of the Duke in ‘*As You Like It*’. Feste is a dependent of Olivia. The fool is invariably a love of creature comforts. Launcelot Gobbo complains that he is famished in the Jew’s household. Feste is seen cringing for money. Sir John Falstaff and Sir Toby Belch are drunkards and big eaters. They are also braggarts and cowards. The clowns are also shown indulging in pranks. They enjoy baiting as seen from the baiting of Malvolio by Feste and others. The clowns also indulge in vulgar jokes and word jugglery. This sometimes leads to sheer nonsensical talk as indulged in by Feste and the fool in ‘Lear”.

The fool as stated already plays an integral and significant function in Shakespeare’s plays. He adds spice to the comedy by his honour and foolery. He provides dramatic relief as well as heightens the intensity of the tragic scenes in the tragedies. This heightening of the tragic effect is by the properly timed juxtaposition of the comic and the tragic. This is best seen in Antony and Cleopatra and *King Lear*. In the comedies, the fool frequently corrects the extra sentimentality of the romantic characters as does Feste in *Twelfth Night* and Touchstone in *As You Like It*.

In *Twelfth Night*, Feste ridicules the ridiculously inflated grief of Olivia for her dead brother. He suggest to Duke Orsino that he should get his tailor to make his clothes of changeable taffeta to suit his quick changing romantic moods. “It is the clown’s office to restore the equilibrium of life which is essence of comedy, whenever that equilibrium is too much disturbed”.

The fool in Shakespeare sometimes performs the function of the chorus in Greek Tragedy. He frequently comments on the course of action and on the different characters as well as supplies the information necessary for a proper understanding of a play. If any character in the plays of Shakespeare may be said to express the view of the playwright, he is certainly the fool. The fool Shakespeare is not just a purveyor of wit and pranks. He is also a philosopher and a critic. The true function of the fool, the clown or the clumsy rustics is to help bring out the ridiculous and the incongruous in the action of the play.

Feste in “*Twelfth Night*” clashes with Malvolio who strongly disapproves of him. Feste plays a great part in the gulling and baiting of the pretentious and unfortunate steward. Feste acts as a goad in bringing out the pretentions of Malvolio. Feste is also shown crossing swords with Viola who comes in the guise of Cesario as an ambassador of love from Olivia. Feste then appears as the boon companion of Sir Toby and Sir Andrew in the caterwauling scene. Feste is seen at his best exposing the sentimentality of Olivia and Orsino.

In Shakespeare’s plays we come across lasting types of ridiculous humanity who are not exactly fools or clowns. Topping the list of such characters is Sir John Falstaff. He is a great figure of fun. He is witty in himself and evokes the wit of others. He is irrepressible. Bottom, the weaver, is another such classic character. He is preposterously vain and ambitious to play all roles in ‘Pyramus and Thisbe’. He is not at all perturbed when his head is transformed into an ass’s head. He takes Titanic’s falling in love with him as a matter of course. Dogberry and

Verges, pompous fools parading their legal knowledge and wisely dodging dangers, are exquisite comic characters.

Shakespeare's fools are integral manifestations of his honour which is generally kindly and tolerant. Shakespeare laughs with a fool and the coxcomb and not at them. He at times, indulges in lash-like satire. Malvolio, cross-gartered and yellow-stocking with the eternal smile on his face, quoting repeatedly from Olivia's supposed love letter is a cruel satire on vanity and puritanism. Sometimes Shakespeare's honour can be grim and morbid as in the grave-digger's scene in "*Hamlet*". In *King Lear* the fool has been introduced in the most tragic situations not only to heighten the tragic effect by contrast but also to serve as the chorus of the play to kindly the sentiments of the audience.

CRITICAL ESSAY OF SHAKESPEARE

William Shakespeare is a playwright who has produced a plethora of memorable texts, being recognised as a benchmark for writers of both the Elizabethan and modern era. Because of Shakespeare's use of language techniques, characters, time-transcending themes which display realistic moral values and the revolutionising change he made to the English language, he is regarded as a playwright of all time. An example of the incorporation of these elements is in the play: *King Lear*. Despite the degree of contrast put forward by critiques, it undeniably composes a tragic tale of greed, love and power, and effectively applies these factors with: sporadic characters, relatable themes and a unique language and structure which continually engage the reader.

William Shakespeare's genius and recognition dominantly lays within the magnificent use of unique language as well as plot-enhancing linguistic devices such as imagery and metaphors, leading to climactic moments and a satisfying resolution. This opens his texts up for interpretation and study in the modern era. His use of language and devices had influenced the creation of at least 3000 modern English words and phrases. In Act 2, Scene 4 of *King Lear*, William Shakespeare demonstrates the use of his complex language and metaphors in conversations between *King Lear* and his daughter, Goneril. Shakespeare uses *King Lear*'s language –which include metaphors and multi-layered writing in order to portray an image of a beast which holds similar characteristics to her –greedy and betraying, those which were portrayed through the betrayal of her father: "struck me with her tongue,/Most serpent-like, upon the very heart" (2.4.154/155).

One of the initial instances of a well plotted linguistic device in this quote is the sense of betrayal presented through the imagery of a malevolent beast – a serpent. A serpent, in Elizabethan time (and still subtly referred to in modern days) is a 'devil in the form of a snake', an entity that resembles somewhat a harmless, or at least avoidable being, but intends to only inflict detriment to another. This metaphorical choice of words presents a fully-grown hatred – portraying a seemingly fitting image of her daughter–one that inflicts pain "upon the heart". This imagery and metaphorical use in the quote allows the audience to understand the emotions of the protagonist–*King Lear*. It displays personal traits of the character with ease, which further moulds the type of relationship between characters. The fine implementation of these linguistic devices: such as

similes to portray a character's feelings and opinions like no other playwright, makes him recognisable and enduring. The language and accompanying devices Shakespeare used is now the basis of a plethora of modern words and phrases: "Full Circle, flawed and foppish", one of the most influential strides in English literature. The implementation and impact of the quote – the way it expresses a relationship, also lies within the structure – also known as the Iambic Pentameter, which incorporates the use of stressed and unstressed syllables in sets of ten. Iambic pentameter, a very complex composition of poetry - has influenced many scholars in present day; his emphasis on this structure made him a playwright of all time.

Despite Shakespeare's unique writing style, his connections of themes with modern reality make him a worthy candidate of an enduring playwright–one that expresses important aspects of life; transcending time. The prominent themes which are universally explored in the play–*King Lear*, are the ideas of justice and the connected themes of betrayal, greed and madness. The initially explored theme is one which can be paralleled in contemporary society–the theme of justice. *King Lear* is undoubtedly a play of pain, agony and avoidable disasters – or human unfairness. As Gloucester states: "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods; /They kill us for their sport" (4.1.42) he soon realises that his current era is one that does not comply with the fair etiquette of human rights and justice – rather a world of unfairness (powerless wanton boys) and undeserved cruelty – humans are killed for enjoyment. Mike Moeller, an online critic, states that (through Gloucester's quote),

Gloucester outlines a: "sheer nihilistic theme" (Moeller, 2009) present in the play – where Mike also believes that the gods provide no reason for this cruelty. The enduring feature is the connection of the theme: justice, with the modern world; with contemporary society now being overrun with injustices (suggested thoroughly in *King Lear* – human cruelty), based on political, cultural and racial agendas. This connection allows humans to develop an understanding of the consequences of cruelty, and recognise mistakes suggested in *King Lear*-and avoid them.

Another theme which periodically develops is greed. The contemporary relevance is evident in the slowly progressive, yet evident development into betrayal, madness, and then tragedy in *King Lear*. The relevance with contemporary life is extremely subtle, yet fully relevant. In *King Lear*, and reality, political agendas are the most affected by this process of development. During *King Lear*, once the kingdom is divided amongst the daughters – greed soon follows (driven by power). This leads to the betrayal of their father, through events such as disallowing him to reside within his own home. The betrayal soon develops into madness –as suggested by the storm :"Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fire! Spout, rain!" (3.2.14) which indicates Lear's inner turmoil, thus leading to tragedy – death. The connection of this theme with the modern era, is prominent in being a timeless playwright. For example, in current political agendas, issues such as overtaxing citizens - later leads to tragedy: economically and politically.

Despite the English language changing – human nature has not, and Shakespeare presents a plethora of compelling characters which not only share similar problems to modern day, but describe varying forms of character in the world. A noticeable factor in the play – *King Lear*, are that the characters have the same motivations, emotions, flaws and weaknesses

as members of a contemporary society – an enduring factor. Many people can see themselves as a placeholder for *King Lear*: the protagonist who is lied and deceived to by his daughters – a relevancy to the modern world. Lee Jamieson, however, argues that *King Lear* is not only egotistical, but a character who (despite making many mistakes) refuses to "regret his own flawed actions" (Jamieson, 2012).

Furthermore, through characters such as Lear, society can both understand and avoid mistakes which were suggested in the play. One of these mistakes include the test he had devised to measure his daughters' compassion for him; a motive which led to tragedy. This test of love suggests that one cannot "heave their heart into their mouths" (1.1.91/92)–a notion popularised in the 21st century, where love is expressed in a more non-verbal fashion: such as showing loyalty or compassion. This quote simply suggests that no matter what Cordelia says, he will never fully understand her feelings for him.

On the flip side, however, there is a betraying antagonist – Edmund, who betrays his brother and deceives his father. The relevancy of Edmund's actions with contemporary society is unmatched. He promotes themes of greed and betrayal, but overall, he is troubled with love, and is narcissistic and egocentric: "Now, then, we'll use/His countenance for the battle, which being done,/Let her who would be rid of him" (5.1.68), where we wishes to only use Albany for his own sake (his authority). This is not only linked with contemporary events–such as political vain (which, like Edmund, normally leads to tragedy), but can relate to relationships in modern society.

A narcissist in any contemporary relationship, who is rather interested in caring for themselves rather than their partner, can cause deterioration and tragedy in any loving connection. Overall, social likes, distastes and ambitions have all remained equal, no matter which time period. Shakespeare–through his astounding depth of description in *King Lear*, devised a set of characters which not only represent similar human issues, but display similar emotions and mistakes to individuals in a contemporary society–a timeless playwright.

Despite the evidence surrounding Shakespeare's universalities incorporated within *King Lear* – many critiques still argue the controversial idea of Shakespeare being a playwright of all time. A great Polish critic-Jan Kott argues that: "In *King Lear* the stage is empty throughout: there is nothing, except the cruel earth, where man goes on his journey from the cradle to the grave" (Kott, 1974, p.118). He believes the reason for this unstable journey which *King Lear* takes part, is based on the contemporary themes of "decay and fall of the world" (Kott, 1974, p.123) which is resultant of sides of just and unjust characters fighting, where "everyone will be destroyed" (Kott, 1974, p.123). However, unlike real tragedies, in *King Lear*, "the world is not healed again" (Kott, 1974, p.123). He suggests that, despite the tragic resolution of *King Lear*, there are moral messages being conveyed – those which are heavily influenced by the torture that greed and madness inflict.

Shakespeare, unlike many preceding playwrights, set an extremely high benchmark for plays in both the modern and Elizabethan era, revolutionising and being the driver for many common terms and phrases we use today - "More sinned against than sinning" (3.2.60). Despite the belief of many, Shakespeare is undoubtedly a playwright of all time, with themes relevant to modern society, memorable linguistic devices and

composition, and the major impact on the current English language. Shown in his play - *King Lear*, there is no hesitation that the mysterious themes put forward are those which relatable in current society - love, greed and power. His unique writing style and composition makes this playwright the foundation of further years of teaching and understanding - a true playwright of all time.

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